

Owen Johnston & Johnston Karate Guide  
to Functional Strength



*Transform your body  
and your life!*

## The Johnston Karate Guide to Functional Strength

### Legal & Author Information

#### Copyright Information:

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The Johnston Karate Guide to Functional Strength

Fitness Instruction, 2nd Edition

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For more about me, please see the 'About the Author' page at the end of the book. If you would like to view full info on my qualifications, schedule a free trial class or consultation, or contact me for any other reason, please visit the following webpage –

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/>

For a free one-page list of supplementary resources I highly recommend, visit the Understanding Karate home page and click on the link near the top that says 'Supplementary Resources'.

<http://understandingkarate.com/>

'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

- Philippians 1:21

## Guide to Functional Strength

### Disclaimer

This book is intended for people of good health and physical condition. The training methods and advice in this book may not be for everyone. Always consult your physician before starting a new exercise program. I am not a physician, and as such, nothing in this book should in any way be taken as medical advice or a substitute for medical advice. Also, this book should not be used to replace advice from your personal physician.

Physical activity always carries with it a risk of injury. When you practice the training methods in this book, always practice proper safety precaution, use proper technique, and apply common sense. The author can not assume any responsibility for any injury, illness, loss or damage that may result from following the training methods in this book.

Lastly, this book is not a replacement for formal instruction. Be sure to seek out a competent, qualified instructor who may carefully observe your progress and provide feedback. This book is intended primarily to be a supplement to, not a replacement for, formal training.

## Guide to Functional Strength

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## **StrengthGuidePDF.com**

### Introduction

'Train hard, train heavy, train progressively, and train smart.'

- Brooks Kubik

You need to be as powerful and functional as you possibly can be, for a long time into your old age. Calisthenics can give you that.

- Paul Wade

This book is based on my continuing research and teaching experience. I believe in continuously updating one's knowledge base and expertise, and as such, I am constantly refining my teaching methods. As such, this book is intended to represent the most up to date information possible regarding how I teach fitness to my students.

Keep in mind that this book is not meant to be a comprehensive text on fitness and health. Consult your physician before starting an exercise program, and be sure to contact a certified fitness trainer to help you discover a nutrition and exercise plan that suits your lifestyle and individual needs. For free articles about nutrition and exercise, please visit my fitness links page. Visit my home page and click on "Fitness Links" near the top.

<http://www.johnstonkarate.com>

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### Fitness 101 – A Basic Tutorial

This is meant to be a concise article summarizing the benefits of exercise, plenty of advice and links to quality resources that will give you a good headstart, as well as a recommended exercise list at the end. If you would like to view a video demonstration of the exercises, point your browser to the above website and click on the 'Fitness 101' link. Just keep in mind that getting into shape and improving your lifestyle habits (including nutrition, rest, scheduling, etc.) take a long term, disciplined approach.

There are many benefits to exercise, including burning calories, elevating your mood, and heart disease prevention. Using cardio training to improve your fitness also improves your circulatory system, strengthens your heart and lungs, improves bone density, which all help immensely not just with other types of exercise, but life in general! Benefits to lifestyle include improved mood, stress / depression relief, better posture, being able to fall asleep quicker, as well as sleeping more deeply.

Not only that, strength training helps not only build your muscle mass and strength, but also your endurance, and performance of daily activities such as lifting, carrying, and walking. Your flexibility is also enhanced, which helps to prevent back pain, and pulling muscles. Not only that, even your ligaments and tendons adapt to training, and become stronger, and less prone to injury. The additional muscle and bone density gained in training also help in reducing injury to joints. The metabolism definitely gets a boost with effective training, which results in improved body composition. The end result will be more muscle and less body fat. More muscle doesn't necessarily mean a big, bulky look - but regular, effective exercise will (as a rule) result in improved muscle tone.

Since this is not meant to be a comprehensive article, keep in mind that there is a lot more to understanding fitness than I can condense into just a few pages. Nutrition and lifestyle changes are two important topics to consider when starting a new fitness program. Also, it's a good idea to join a local gym where a certified fitness trainer can help you figure out the best options and routines. Lastly, if you're new to fitness, you'll want to get at least a basic idea about nutrition, body mechanics, and fitness concepts. As such, feel free to read hand selected articles I've linked to from my Fitness Links page. Simply point your web browser to my home page and click on "Fitness Links" near the top.

<http://www.johnstonkarate.com>

Also be sure to check out the blog below, which has plenty of YouTube playlists of martial arts and fitness videos that I highly recommend.

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

If you're just starting out, I recommend calisthenics, also known as body weight training. Calisthenics train the whole body – muscles and joints. This means no equipment required, so you can practice the exercises anywhere. Practicing calisthenics builds functional strength and muscle tone very naturally. It also boosts the metabolism. Even if you're already in shape, easier calisthenics exercises can help train your whole body, strengthen any weak areas, and rehabilitate joints.



Fitness 101 continued

I personally teach my own unique approach to calisthenics, which is given a general description in the article “Progressive Calisthenics for Strength”. My approach is mostly based on Convict Conditioning, which teaches training progressions that range from easy to insane full body strength. I would highly recommend progressive calisthenics to anyone trying to get into shape. It's an approach, not a set routine! Once you understand the basic concepts, you can become your own coach.

Two other ways to build strength and muscle are weights and machines. If you decide on either of these, start light, and build gradually over time. Before starting a program, though, be sure to find a workout partner you trust, or visit a local gym and talk to a certified fitness trainer. Gradually introduce more protein into your diet from natural sources, and supplements if needed. (Nuts, grains, cheese, milk, various types of protein powders such as whey and creatine, etc.)

I also recommend kettlebell training. Due to the ballistic, full body nature of a kettlebell workout, it accelerates fat loss, packs on lean muscle, and builds explosiveness. Kettlebells help with cardio, power, speed, muscle endurance, stance training, mental toughness, efficiency in movement, and strengthening your core. Strength and stamina in the lower back, legs, shoulders, and grip also benefit. Caution and proper form must be used at all times with kettlebells – as such, seek out a qualified instructor before starting.

Change up your routines up once in a while if it helps you stay motivated. Also, what you do outside of the gym or exercise in general is just as important, such as making any necessary lifestyle changes, as well as getting the right nutrition and rest. Always try to eat fresh and drink things like water, tea, gatorade, fruit smoothies etc instead of sodas.

If you want to bulk up, work up to heavy weight and/or hard calisthenics exercises with low reps. If you want to tone up, you will want to start burning off any unhealthy weight, while also building muscle in challenging strength sessions. The key is to burn more calories than you take in. Remember to have a small, nutritious meal after a hard workout, such as a protein shake and a piece of fruit. Also, always give your body enough recovery time after a workout. Moderately heavy to heavy amounts of lifting should be done every other day to allow time to recover. ("Heavy" depending upon what level of training you are at.)

Need to lose weight? Get out and get movin'! Get any kind of cardio you can fit into your daily routine. Do laundry, some yard work, walk the dog, whatever! Get on the bike, jog, take an aerobics class...The list goes on! Find a friend to go outside and get active with - have fun with it!

**Next page – exercise list**

Fitness 101 continued

**Exercise List.** Let's look at some recommended body weight, dumb bell, and curl bar exercises. Remember to set realistic goals - such as allowing a few months to achieve the right look. Feel free to research other exercises as needed to help train for your own personal performance goals, and talk to your fitness instructor for ideas on how to tweak your routine.

1. Basic warmups and stretches. Warmups should usually include joint rotations, which oil up the joints, and some kind of aerobic activity, such as skipping rope, walking, or jogging. Aerobic activity warms up your body temperature and increases blood flowing. This helps to improve your muscular performance and 'elasticity', which helps to prevent injury (such as pulling a muscle).

If you do not stretch correctly, injuries can occur, so always start slowly if you are new to flexibility training. Start with a few minutes of static stretching, which is used to stretch out the muscles while the body is at rest, then move onto dynamic stretching. Remember to do light aerobic activity such as walking or jogging and some more static stretching, at the end of your workout to cool down the body. View the pages below for static and dynamic stretching -

[www.brianmac.co.uk/stretch.htm](http://www.brianmac.co.uk/stretch.htm)

[www.brianmac.co.uk/dynamic.htm](http://www.brianmac.co.uk/dynamic.htm)

2. Pushup variations. These work primarily the pectorals, triceps, and deltoids. One armed pushups are the gold standard in chest and elbow strength.

3. Curls with dumb bells – these work the biceps. If done standing, use light weight if necessary to practice correct form. If using a curl bar, sit in a stable chair with your back flat against it, with your elbows locked in against your body. This will help stabilize the body, and isolate the biceps.

4. Alternating front raises with dumb bells - works anterior deltoid. Allow your body to swing as little as possible – maintain correct form at all times.

5. Military presses with curl bar - works the deltoid muscles in the shoulders as well as the core and legs, which you must use to stabilize the weight.

6. Squats with curl bar - works the quadriceps. If you have trouble with your knees or ankles, lower the weight or do squats normally without the bar.

7. "Skull crushers" with curl bar - works the triceps.

8. Dead lift with curl bar - works grip strength with the erector spinae, gluteus maximus, adductor magnus, hamstrings, and quadriceps serving as the primary muscles.

9. Pullup variations – pullups are a compound exercise that primarily work the biceps, and latissimus dorsi (or 'lats' for short). The lats are the largest muscles on the torso, and run from your armpits to down beyond the ribs. Most of the other muscles in the back also get

Fitness 101 continued

worked by doing pullups. Not only that, your fingers, palms, and forearms are given a great workout by holding up and pulling your body weight as you grip the bar. This translates to building grip strength. Lastly, pullups give your abs and hips a great isometric workout. Because of these benefits, pullups help train the body for hanging leg raises.

To do a pullup, start by getting a good grip on a horizontal bar or anything sturdy you can hang from. Keep your shoulder girdle tight and your elbows slightly kinked in the starting position, to help prevent injury. Generally, with full pullups, you will try to pull your body weight up until the chin clears the bar, and you then lower the body until your arms and shoulders are almost fully extended. If you don't have the strength yet to complete the full range of motion, start with easier variations of the pullup. Also, to work strictly on grip strength, try working on hanging grip work (again using a horizontal bar or anything you can hang from).

Visit the page below for ideas on improving grip strength -  
<http://goo.gl/D9b4go>

10. Leg raises from a horizontal bar. This primarily works all the muscles in the abs, as well as your lats. You also get some benefits to your forearms and shoulders, since they are used to hold your weight from the bar. When you first grab onto the bar, do nothing else until your momentum has disappeared. Your body should be still and your legs straight before you start the first repetition of the exercise. Slowly raise your legs as far as you can. As your abs get stronger you can increase your range of motion in this exercise. If this exercise is too hard at first, try hanging knee raises or flat bent knee raises.

Transform your life

With time, patience, proper training, proper nutrition, and proper attention to lifestyle factors, almost anyone can transform their body and their life. It takes a lot of time and dedication – it could take at least a full year to achieve a trim, proportioned, fit look. Yes, of course you will see some results within two weeks if you're training at least twice a week and watching your nutrition.

But to get a whole new body – trimming down while building up the muscles – is a long term, difficult process. It takes time to replace old habits with new ones. You also have to pay a lot of attention to nutrition, losing weight slowly (instead of too quickly), learning how to train (skill), building up the stamina and strength for truly intense training, while not over training. Over training fatigues mind and body, slowing your progress, and over training also leads to injury. Certainly, you do want to train hard, but allow for recovery. Push past your comfort zone, but not to injury.

The fortunate thing, though, is that hard work builds not just strength, but willpower and confidence as well. It takes guts and tenacity to train hard! Most people give up too easily, before they see results. Don't give up! Climb that mountain!

Thoughts on training – "slow and steady"

When it comes to training, whether in martial arts or for any area of fitness, let's remember the old phrase – "Slow but steady wins the race." Never be in such a rush that you don't plan your workout, or that you do not train your body and mind through the preparatory stages. It's certainly great to feel out new exercises as a test of strength ability, but do not venture into "over training", which could lead to injury. Of course, this is not to say we shouldn't work hard when we train! Progression is the name of the game. We have to keep steadily improving each workout. If we're using weight, try to add sets, reps, variety, or weight each week. If practicing body weight training, change something up a little bit each day that you work out.

And remember slow but steady – gradual progress! This is especially true as we get older. Aging is not a death sentence for your training – in fact, we can continue improving at many things throughout a lifetime and maintain great health! But we must also be realistic and remember that we have to accommodate a potentially slower recovery rate. And when it comes to progress, especially when it comes to us older athletes (I was born in the 70s, myself)

-

"Longer is one thing. Never is something entirely different. And longer always beats never." – Brooks Kubik

If you want a pile of info on some sensible workouts, pick up his book, Chalk and Sweat, through the below link. I don't make a single cent by recommending the book. I have read his Dinosaur Training and Dinosaur Body Weight Training books and they have been working for me so far. As such, I am happy to recommend his stuff!

[http://www.brookskubik.com/chalk\\_and\\_sweat.html](http://www.brookskubik.com/chalk_and_sweat.html)

## StrengthGuidePDF.com

### Specificity in training

I am certainly a huge advocate of building strength and fitness. However, I also try to remind all of my students that it is necessary to engage in training specific to your athletic activity of choice. This way, you will be able to properly express that strength in movement!

Understanding Sport Specific Exercises: <http://goo.gl/fw1jVX>

In the beginning, it is indeed important to build “absolute strength” in the muscles needed for your chosen activity. This provides a foundation for the other end of the strength spectrum, “speed strength” or power. On the other hand, if you started on the speed strength end of the spectrum (basketball, for instance), you can still get some benefits to power by working on absolute strength.

“Absolute strength – The maximum force an athlete can exert with his or her whole body, or part of the body, irrespective of body size or muscle size”

Explanation of strength - <http://www.brianmac.co.uk/strength.htm>

“Power {(Force × Distance) ÷ Time} represents the product of strength and speed of movement expressed in Watts.”

Explanation of power - <http://www.brianmac.co.uk/power.htm>

For a better understanding, watch this video on the strength continuum.

Strength continuum video on YouTube: <http://goo.gl/XyEQw8>

Setting training goals

I try to keep the habit of writing out a training program for each new personal training client. This helps both of us set clear goals to work towards. Of course, we have to remember that consistency, hard work, and motivation are paramount in any endeavor, especially training! Granted, it is important to personalize workout programs, whether for ourselves or for a client. Understanding our emotional and mental health at the time, not just our physical health, should (of course) be taken into account when planning our training.

Also, we have to figure out S.M.A.R.T. goals. Specific, measurable, attainable (or actionable), relevant (or realistic), and timely. If our goals are vague and not concrete (or measurable), there will not be any clear, objective way to work towards them. Specificity deals with not just numbers (hitting a set / rep goal, or how much weight), but also, the reasoning behind the goals. Basically, our long term goal(s) should help us define our S.M.A.R.T. goals – like comparing strategy to tactics.

Here is an example. Do you want to become a better competitor in boxing or prepare for a specific matchup? You will have to define your strategy around this, and your training goals and tactics must support your strategy. Of course, your coaches will be of great help in developing a sound strategy for winning. The types of training you will want to set goals for will include – attending the gym to work with sparring partners who can help you prepare; improving your physical conditioning (set specific goals for roadwork, sprints etc based upon how many rounds the match will be); highly specific padwork; highly specialized strength and conditioning work that will improve the physical qualities needed to defeat your opponent; and so forth.

Below is a great motivational article on S.M.A.R.T. goals that includes a printable PDF worksheet!

<http://goo.gl/FJP64G>

## StrengthGuidePDF.com

### Workout Design

Set S.M.A.R.T. goals – specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely

For more about setting goals, view the previous article

Workout frequency – 1-3x / week for beginners

Workout structure – full body workouts, push/pull split, upper body / lower body split, full body / sports split, or other variation

Test your abilities in training progressions to verify which progression(s) you will include in the current or next training cycle

Always include at least some warmup sets before your work sets; try to also include skill work (hand balancing, gymnastics rings, parallettes, or any other skill based movement) – even if you're not a gymnast, this is still useful as it helps you develop control, stamina, and general body awareness; also try to include some mobility work and active flexibility (bridges, L-sits, twist stretches, joint work in general)

Work volume (how many total repetitions / sets) and variety (number of exercises per workout) – keep relatively low if you're a beginner; normally I recommend no more than 3 exercises per workout and no more than 4 or 5 total sets (2-3 warmup sets, 2-3 work sets) if you're a complete beginner

Intensity and load – in weight lifting terms, having more weight – “load” will make the exercise more intense and more likely to force adaptations. In calisthenics, there are variables you can experiment with that will make an exercise more or less intense. The harder an exercise is, the less reps you will be able to do. I do not believe there is any “perfect” rep/set scheme! It depends on your body type, your goals, the exercise in question, and other factors. A basic guideline to keep in mind is that you do need to make sure that the exercises you select are difficult enough to force adaptations, meaning that you will build strength and mass.

“Are You Sabotaging Your Gains with the Wrong Rep Range?” - article page, short URL - <http://goo.gl/E9FROi>

The above article is more weight lifting oriented, but the principles still apply to calisthenics. However, I will still link a calisthenics related FAQ. The author details some training programs, from beginner to advanced. FAQ link - <http://goo.gl/UY6t9L>



Workout Design continued

Working up – if you’re a beginner to intermediate trainee, slowly build up repetitions until you can meet the “progression standard” (set amount of reps / sets) for a particular progression, then test your abilities again to see if you can move up in the progression. If you can’t, there are a few things you can try – add an assistance exercise (such as using a wrist roller to assist grip strength for pullups) or change a variable or two in the exercise you met the repetition standard for (perhaps slightly change hand positioning, locking down your form better, using slow eccentric reps, etc).

If you’re new to writing workout programs, check out the modified version of a training program I wrote up for a client, which starts on page 20.

Training cycles – as you become more advanced (around 2 years of training) you may need to explore more advanced workout structures or weekly cycles. I include an advanced session template in this book as an example. It is on page 19.

The below article by the author of “Overcoming Gravity” details beginner training programs, as well as how to progress beyond them, and also links out to intermediate programs - <http://goo.gl/5UK328>

“Overcoming Gravity” also has some advanced training program ideas. I highly recommend it – you can purchase a printed or PDF edition of the book at the below page -

<http://goo.gl/rUCdK2>

Workout Templates**Calisthenics Workout**

Warmups – cardio, mobility, stretches

Skill work – gymnastics holds and agility drills

Core of the workout – calisthenics warmup sets and work sets (add sandbags if desired)

Finisher – sprints, sandbags or “hojo undo” corner, then do neck, gut, and grip work

**Sandbags Workout**

Warmups – cardio, mobility, stretches, calisthenics warmup sets

Core of the workout – clean and press, shoulder toss, upright rows, bear hug carry, curls, deadlifts or squats, shoulder carry, farmer’s walk

Finisher – pick a “hojo undo” tool to work for a few minutes, then do neck, gut, and grip work

Warmdowns – stretches, massage, active flexibility work (bridges, hold lunges, etc)

**Hojo Undo Workout**

Warmups – cardio, mobility, stretches (focus on the wrists, shoulders, elbows, and ankles)

Core of the workout – warmup sets with lighter tools, with a focus on technique; work sets using heavier tools or high rep work sets with lighter tools – make sure to use a variety of tools

Finisher – neck and gut work, “hojo undo” makiage kigu (wrist rollers) for grip work

Learn more about calisthenics - “All about Progressive Calisthenics” article in this guide

Learn more about sandbag training – see the article in this guide

Learn more about “Hojo Undo” - <http://goo.gl/GwTbps>

Basic template – advanced training session

I prefer to have slightly sophisticated yet also very difficult training sessions for advanced martial arts students and competitors. Below, I detail a basic template for this kind of session, which includes warmups, mobility, strength and conditioning, and martial arts practice, then a finisher. For students who are tight on time, you can squeeze all of this into an hour, if you don't do as many "rounds". However, a two hour session is preferable. Compare to a session at a boxing gym. On Saturdays, when students – on average – will have more time available, I will normally run two separate sessions – one for strength and conditioning, and another for martial arts practice, both with "finishers" – with a half hour break inbetween (usually with sports drinks involved). Here is the basic template for a consolidated "advanced" session, which can be modified to suit intermediate students:

Warmup to sweating – more or less depending on goals – but if you need a lot of cardio for your goals, you'll need a separate session altogether for it

Joint circling – primarily the joints you'll be using in the workout – do so between rounds of skipping rope or when you take a break during a run

Water break

Massage and stretch whatever is stiff – take 5 to 10 minutes of active stretching

Skill work – agility drills, hand balancing, gymnastics drills, whatever

Warmup sets – wall pushups, chair pushups – that kind of thing – easy exercises that help you warm up to the movements in the "work sets"

Work sets (will depend on goals, current level of conditioning, etc)

Water break

Stretch and "circle" as needed

Martial arts basics and drills, or forms and applications – depending on the day of the week or the style that the students are working on that night

Finishers -

Sandbag training, sparring, grappling, any required toughening (for a sport – such as rice bucket training for baseball or martial arts), whatever

Cooldowns -

Walking, repeat a few of the warmup sets from earlier, that sort of thing

Mobility exercises as needed for your particular sport or needs (the key is injury prevention)

Training Program for Fitness Client

I wrote up a program for a new fitness client. She is more or less totally new to being in a dedicated fitness program, but she wants to lose weight and tone up. As such, the program had to start her off with the basics. I chose a short list of training progressions for body weight exercises. The goal is to gently train every area of the body with easy, therapeutic calisthenics exercises. Once the goal number of repetitions for an exercise is attained, with good form, we will move up in the progression, in order to continue building strength – which of course will also add some lean muscle mass.

Here are the major reasons why I will keep the client on a steady diet of calisthenics. Most calisthenics exercises are compound movements, meaning they act on multiple joints. This means more muscles being worked instead of only working one muscle in isolation. Stabilizer muscles get work as well. As such, calisthenics build functional athletic strength, and as a result, will take the physique to optimal development – not some freaky “muscle magazine” look. Not only that, they protect and strengthen the joints and connective tissues, unlike heavy weights work. Lastly, a steady diet of calisthenics normalizes and regulates body fat levels. All of these fall in line with my client’s goals.

I also need to explain a bit about why relatively high repetitions are the way to go with calisthenics. The early techniques in each progression have a rehabilitative effect, especially when done for very high repetitions. (Of course, when you move up in difficulty, it will drive rep counts down.) High reps also ingrain proper form, as well as demonstrate strength in a particular technique. (Who’s stronger at pushups? Someone who can do 10, or 20?) Of course, if you want to continue building strength through calisthenics, you can’t simply continue adding repetitions. At some point you have to make an exercise more difficult, which will mean you will not be able to do as many repetitions. Generally, to go beyond 20 or 30 reps is to venture into endurance building, rather than strength. This depends on the exercise and the person, though.

“Are You Sabotaging Your Gains with the Wrong Rep Range?” - article page, short URL - <http://goo.gl/E9FROi>

Below is a slightly modified version of what I wrote up for her:

#### Preliminaries

We will build up to doing all of the below warmups, moves, and holds. Pick at least one day during the week to do all of the moves. You could instead do your repetitions of one move, per day. (Such as doing your pushups on Monday, squats on Tuesday, etc.) Always remember to warm up for at least 5 to 10 minutes before doing any of the other exercises. Anything that gets your heart pumping. Also, remember to stretch and work on your joints. You don’t want to do anything too rigorous right before doing the exercises, or it will take away from them.

The guide below includes some other routines we can borrow from later on once we have you used to the basics. The point is not to get stuck on routines, but to teach you the approach so that you can be your own coach and figure out what routines are best for you:

<http://goo.gl/UY6t9L>

Training Program for Fitness Client continued

I recommend doing all of the listed moves and holds in one routine, since it makes for a full body routine. Your goal at first is a minimum of 10 repetitions per exercise. That would make one set of 10 repetitions. If you know you can do more of the exercise, try to do a second set of at least 10 repetitions. If you can do a third set of any exercise, great! If you can only do one set of an exercise at first, add repetitions each week until you can do one set of 20 or 25. Then, the following workout, try do the 20 or 25, then do a second set for as many as you can up to 20 or 25. Once you have built up to this, we'll be able to start a more difficult exercise. Don't worry – we will expect less reps of the more difficult exercise, so we won't be jumping in at the deep end!

Warmup exercises – we'll go over these each week. Just do the ones you can remember whenever you work out, or design your own warmups. At least include some kind of cardio or aerobic activity for 5 to 10 minutes, joint circling and active stretching (such as shoulder rotations). Try to stretch out all of the joints and muscles you'll be using in the workout and try to simulate the movement patterns you'll be doing as well.

Once you build up to a target number of repetitions for an exercise and move up to a harder one, you can add the exercise you mastered to warmups. For instance, once you hit the repetition goal for incline pushups, we will move on to kneeling pushups, and you will do a short to medium set of incline pushups as part of the warmups for kneeling pushups. Below are the 5 progressions from we'll be drawing from until we move up in difficulty a few levels. Once we have done that, you'll have the foundation of both strength and skill to move into other progressions.

Pushups (we'll start with wall pushups or inclines depending on what you can do)

Pullups (starting with vertical pulls – very easy)

Bridging

Leg raises

Squats

Notes: We'll try two types of each of the last three to see how we should progress. For the time being we're going to work on the basics – getting the form down. Building up to a lot of repetitions is important for ingraining the correct form into your nervous system. Of course, this builds your strength in the first stages of learning, and then your stamina as you add lots of reps. As you improve we'll keep tweaking your form. Once you hit the target number of reps for an exercise, we'll start working on the next exercise in the progression. Sometimes, though, we will have to make small changes to an existing exercise, making it just a bit harder, instead of jumping up in the progression. This is because some in some cases, the next exercise in a progression will require quite a lot more strength than the previous one, and may be too difficult for you to do for multiple repetitions. Of course, I'd still want to teach you how to adjust different variables for every exercise you master, so that you can make them easier or harder, or hit muscles in different ways.

Training Program for Fitness Client continued

Summary – once you master an exercise, we'll find ways to make an exercise more difficult, or work on the next exercise in the progression, and ultimately, we'll work on both.

Take a break of at least 1 minute, and a maximum of 3 minutes, between sets. One you can hit progression standard on each exercise, your total time working on the exercises, with rest breaks between sets, will be 20 to 30 minutes. With the warmups and some static holds added in, eventually your workouts with me will be 45 minutes to an hour.

As you add sets and reps, your workout time will increase, meaning more calories burned, your metabolism will improve, cravings SHOULD lessen, you'll start looking and feeling better, and you'll feel stronger as well. Once we've moved up a few times in each progression, you'll have the strength, stamina, and skill to branch out into a few other progressions.

Now for a few "static holds" – you will want to hold these for at least 10 seconds each, and build up time each workout. The goal is at least 1 minute each.

Lunge – push off with one foot and step forward as deeply as you can with the other. For instance, if you step forward with your left leg, you will want to push off on your right foot. You will end up with the front knee deeply bent. As you bend forward, you should feel a good stretch on the back leg. Keep the back knee at least slightly bent. Once you build up to being able to do a very deep lunge, you will want to be on the ball of the back foot. Hold the lunge position for at least 10 seconds and concentrate on stretching as deeply as you can, without pain. The number one rule of any stretch is to do so to the point of mild to moderate discomfort, not pain. Pain is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong or that you are doing something too hard, or too much. Lastly, make sure that after you hold a lunge with one foot forward, do the same with the other leg, and try to hold the same amount of time. Try to add time every week until you're holding for 30 seconds, two to four times each leg, then we'll add another static hold for the legs.

Six inches – lay flat on your back with your knees straight. Lift your feet 6 inches off the floor and do NOT bend your knees! Hold your knees stiff and your feet 6 inches off the floor for a minimum of 10 seconds. Add time each workout until you can hold for 30 seconds, 4 times (or more!)

Horizontal hang grip – find something sturdy that you can climb under and hold onto. This might be a desk, chair, parallel bars such as at a gym or park, or even a hand rail (such as on a wheelchair ramp or a walkway). Again, hold this for at least 10 seconds and add time each workout if possible.

### Calisthenics Program Design for Beginners

If you're a rank beginner to the fitness world, coming back to it, or just coming back from an injury, I recommend starting slow and working on a handful of simple holds and moves at first. The exercises I list below are all compound movements but they each emphasize certain muscle groups. Below are some simple compound moves that you can start with. By no means do you have to stick to only these exercises, especially if you're already into Yoga, gymnastics, or similar. Also, once you get used to these exercises, you can add at least one new training progression and/or a new training day each week. The idea behind this article isn't to get new trainees "stuck in a box" but to share some basics that each train multiple muscle groups, are easy to learn, and can help you put together "full body workouts".

View previous articles in this guide for more information about setting training goals and designing your own workouts.

#### **Exercises**

Holds:

Bridges

Planks

Midsection holds

Shoulder holds such as downward facing dog, headstand, frog stand

Bottom of a deep squat

Moves:

Squats

Wall pushups, chair pushups

Sit in a chair and perform knee tucks

Or lie on your back for knee raises, or leg raises

Let Me Ins

Gradually build your range of motion and your reps. You can split the exercises across different days depending on your goals and current level of stamina. I recommend starting each workout with a few minutes of cardio. Getting your heart rate up and a light bit of sweat is the goal. Then do some light stretching for the body parts you will train that day and joint circling for anything that feels stiff. Thirdly, practice at least two or three holds with an eye on form. Your moves should be done for 2 or 3 short sets each at first, and you'll gradually build reps.

Remember to balance the workout. For instance, work pushing muscles, then work pulling muscles, repeat, or do an explosive exercise then a deep stretch hold, for example. For holds you can build up to at least a minute each or perform them as moves for reps. (Such as bridge pushups or moving into different planks.)

### Calisthenics Program Design for Beginners continued

Strength training sessions should be every other day for beginners!

On the other days, it's totally fine and actually encouraged to stay active! Do something that you enjoy - gardening, Zumba, what have you!

#### **Example day 1**

Cardio  
Light stretching  
Deep squat  
Shoulder bridge or tabletop bridge  
Let me ins or another pulling movement  
Any pushup variation  
Knee tucks or any other leg raise variation

Do some "cooldowns" at the end - deep stretching and breathing, joint circling, etc. I recommend practicing deep breathing exercises while in a "hold" (such as the bottom of a squat, or in a Yoga posture, for example)

#### **Example day 2**

Cardio  
Light stretching (especially wrists, thighs, hamstrings, and ankles)  
Shoulder holds or inversions (tripod, headstand, frog stand, etc.) - build up to 2 minutes total  
Midsection holds - choose from six inches, candlestick, sitting in a chair and extending your feet (knees locked), and similar holds that you have the strength for  
Planks  
Squats

Add other lower body work once you have built up enough strength and range of motion in squats and bridges - do at least two other exercises - ideas include squat jumps, lunges, and duck walk to work the legs, also add in calf raises and short bridges as a move (aka bridge curls - with or without a chair).

Cooldowns



### Calisthenics Program Design for Beginners continued

#### **Example day 3**

Cardio

Light stretching

Hold a shoulder bridge or tabletop bridge for time, then deep hamstring stretch, repeat

Midsection holds - build up to at least 2 minutes total time each

Short bridge (aka glute bridge)

Planks - build up to at least 2 minutes total time each

Light stretching and joint circling for at least 1 minute

Knee tucks - build up to doing two short sets and two or three work sets

(Move on to leg raises and start with a lower number of sets again, once you're used to knee tucks.)

Cooldowns

A note about time: I don't mention how long to warm up or how long each workout should be because there are so many variables. Some days you'll need a longer, more gradual warmup. This is more true as we get older. Don't rush it - think of it as like cooking - it's a slow roast! The workout should be fairly brief, with bouts of intensity, but definitely long enough for your body to get the "training stimulus". More than 20-30 minutes for the exercises done for reps will usually be unnecessary if you're working hard enough. Still, focus on the intensity of the moves rather than how long you do them or how many reps you can do. The reps will come in time. Add a little here, a little there. Mainly focus on the quality of your exercises.

With this in mind, remember to take up to a 2 or 3 minute active rest between moves so you can refresh the muscles. I recommend stretching, or pacing your training area while joint circling, perhaps even get into a hold (such as a headstand or bridge) for up to a minute or so. Remember to practice deep breathing - this helps recover much faster, as well! As you improve, you can up the intensity by decreasing rest times and later add other intensity variables such as supersets, drop sets, slowmo training, burner sets (where you try to do all of your work sets for an exercise back to back), etc.

Also on the topic of quality, I recommend doing two brief warmup sets of a move before performing your "work sets" - such as doing some wall pushups or chair pushups before doing kneeling or full pushups. This helps you focus on the quality of the movements and it also has a neurological benefit for your work sets. (It has to do with "warming up" your mind and your neural pathways for what you're about to do- helps recruit more motor units, basically. Strength is a skill!!)

Calisthenics Program Design for Beginners

Don't worry too much about adding other exercises yet unless you're comfortable with any that work the same muscle groups as any of the exercises I've mentioned. In those cases, mix and match - find a good groove and remember to log your workouts so that you can chart progress. Write down what you're working on, any thoughts or comments (even if it's just how your emotional state was that day and how it helped or how you worked through it), your goals, and your sets / reps for moves and time for holds.

Also don't worry about more complicated training programs for a while. Try to master the basics first, and then make them harder by adding "tougheners". Once you've gained some experience, and you feel like moving beyond the basics to fancier exercises, I recommend moving on to gymnastics skills and/or more advanced progressive calisthenics movements and holds.

Program Design for Advanced Athletes

Depending on your experience, strength, and goals, choose a 2, 3, or 4 way weekly split. A 2 way split could be handled a number of ways – a push/pull workout and a lower body/abdominal workout; two different full body workouts; etc. A 3 way split could use the first 3 programs that I list in the workout template section of this article. Feel free to substitute or add exercises that fit your goals. One may add a short skill session or full body session as a warmup to any of these routines, borrowing ideas from the other two workouts listed. One could also add a 4th hard workout to the weekly split, and a 5th day for skill practice & mobility.

Never over-train (as it could lead to burnout and/or injury), or work the same muscle group very hard two days in a row, though! If you're into athletic sports, this is especially vital.

Plan your own training cycles. I recommend reading the following -

“Grease the groove” cycles - <http://goo.gl/aZb9zw>

Periodization - <http://goo.gl/VBTDMa>

Beginning on the 5th page of this article are my own advanced strength training workout templates. Of course, each workout is going to be a little different depending on exactly what I want to emphasize and how I've been progressing. All of the exercises are bodyweight only except where I specifically state a type of external resistance.

Calisthenics skill work to choose from (by no means a comprehensive list) - muscleups, levers (back, front, side, elbow), midsection holds, hand balancing (hand walking, transitions, one arm work, and so much more), advanced pistols

Specialization exercises - the programs starting on the next page already have some specializations built in. The sky is the limit, though - you can progress to old school feats in these specializations and train them to develop overall body power. Such feats include partner press flags (which are technically side levers), partner resisted bridges, and so forth.

There is a lot of variety to hand and forearm specializations as well. This includes digit grip hangs, digit pullups, uses for towels and thick bars in hang grip work and pullups, wrist curls (vertical or Australian), wrist pushups, working with awkward objects and/or sandbags, wrist rollers, and so forth.

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued

Remember to do plenty of mobility work for the hands and to be cautious as to how hard you train them. Do work hard, but keep in mind that the hands have a lot of small delicate joints that can be prone to injury and need to be trained gradually. Start with the recommended number of sessions for grip and fingers each week. As you build up your joints, though, you can start seeing great progress! Eventually you can add a bit of hand and forearm training to other sessions. Specializing in various hollow body holds and other gymnastics related skills is another avenue.

Prehab, short for “pre-habilitation” is an important part of your warmups.

<http://goo.gl/B4znAs>

Add neck, midsection, back, grip, finger, and skill work as needed into your sessions once you're ready. Partner leg throwdowns, decline situps (with or without weight), and dragon flags are great midsection exercises. For the back, add some sandbag good mornings after you finish up your bridging work. You can hold the sandbag in the Zercher position, in a bear hug, on a shoulder, or across your shoulders.

Transitional work is a major component of training towards fully asymmetrical pullups, pushups, and squats (such as one arm pushups, one arm elbow levers, and pistol squats). In these exercises, both arms or legs will still be used, but one limb is worked harder than the other. Such exercises are called transitional, since they help you transition from symmetrical to fully asymmetrical.

Sandbags can be used to add resistance to bodyweight exercises, but it is recommended to not do so until you have move up in various progressions and gained sufficient technical proficiency. Partner resistance is another great method. Just be sure to perform 2-3 warmup sets and 1-3 work sets without weight before doing any work sets with added weight. You can do this for every calisthenics progression that you are working that you have sufficient experience, technique, and strength in. Keep in mind that adding weight will not be safe or even possible with certain skills or progressions.

Personally, I usually add at least a few extra minutes of skill work to a workout if energy and motivation allow. If I have "hojo undo" tools available, I'll sometimes use at least one as part of my mobility work (such as rice bucket exercises or performing blocks and other movements slowly and deeply with a light strength stone), or perform lifts with a moderately heavy tool in place of / in addition to sandbag work.

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued

If you are aiming to build muscle, either a calisthenics-oriented bodybuilding protocol or calisthenics strength training will yield results. Strength and mass are not mutually exclusive, but are on a training continuum. Still, I'll summarize the basic ideas:

**“Bodybuilding” (hypertrophy with a focus on the muscles):**

The goal is to exhaust the muscles with high reps of simple to moderate complexity exercises that allow you to perform a moderate to full range of motion, and generate intense muscle contractions. While the intensity should be kept high, it should also allow you to perform enough sets and reps to exhaust the muscle(s).

The sets you perform each exercise for should be kept low to moderate, while the reps should be kept high, and the rest periods between sets (inter-set rest) should be kept relatively short. Training frequency should be low, to allow muscles to recover. Don't do bodybuilding workouts two days in a row, and 3 per week is usually enough for even advanced athletes.

Useful tactics: Ladders (sets of increasing reps), supersets, extended sets (such as using eccentrics / negatives, rest-pause sets, and/or drop sets), even higher reps, very slow reps, emphasis on a muscle or muscle group (specialization exercises), and going through a strength training cycle (since stronger muscles can use higher loads and generate more intense contractions).

Great article on building mass through calisthenics -

<http://pccblog.dragondoor.com/ten-commandments-calisthenics-mass/>

**Strength training (hypertrophy with a focus on the nervous system):**

The goal is to perform slightly high sets of low to moderate reps of the most difficult compound (multi-joint) movements that you can do with good form in each rep. The rest periods between sets should be just long enough to allow you to practice “fresh”. An example number of sets and reps for strength training – 2-5 sets of 1-6. Training frequency can be built up to a moderate amount. Multiple weekly sessions are viable since the muscles aren't being worked to complete exhaustion.

As a rule, you are focusing on ingraining these intense movements into your nervous system. Gradually tighten up form. Of course, it's still important to utilize high rep sets for warmups to gradually prepare the mind, muscles, and nervous system for the hard work to come.

Useful tactics: Pyramids (sets of decreasing reps), grease the groove, high intensity interval training, skill work

Technique: Tension, bracing, breathing methods, laser focus, muscle synergy

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued

Advanced templates begin on the next page. Remember that the key words are progression, intensity, recovery, safety, therapy, and nutrition. Lifestyle factors are actually more important than the training itself, but always stay motivated and train hard as well!

Keep safety a priority when training, especially when stretching. Ease into the stretch slowly while focusing on how you are breathing, in order to allow the muscles to relax. Generally, hold stretches for at least 30 seconds each. Listen to your body and let it tell you when you've touched your limit. The rule here is to stretch to the point of mild to moderate discomfort – not pain; stretching should feel good! Avoid any stretches where you bounce, but dynamic stretches and Yoga are still highly recommended! Just practice care and caution, and remember it will take time to increase flexibility.

I highly recommend also reading the books “C-Mass” (by Paul “Coach” Wade, author of “Convict Conditioning”), and “Chalk and Sweat” (by Brooks Kubik, author of “Dinosaur Training”) for the many great programs they have for beginners, intermediates, and advanced trainees.

Calisthenics Mass: How To Maximize Muscle Growth Using Bodyweight-Only Training  
<http://goo.gl/IR1ZOj>

Chalk and Sweat  
[http://www.brookskubik.com/chalk\\_and\\_sweat.html](http://www.brookskubik.com/chalk_and_sweat.html)

For exercise descriptions, progressions, and more, check out my training articles and videos. Visit the site below and click on the link of interest in the top menu.  
<http://strengthguidepdf.com>

A YouTube playlist I put together with plenty of tutorials for calisthenics, sandbags, and much more: <http://goo.gl/QF7mUT>

I also want to recommend the book “Diamond-Cut Abs” by Danny Kavadlo. The book is worth the asking price for the nutritional advice alone. Danny cuts past the BS and myths that the fitness industry perpetuates, and lays it out straight. Of course, the exercises are amazingly functional as well!  
<http://goo.gl/QLraau>

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Lower body and core workout**

Full bodyweight squats give plenty of work the quadriceps, glutes, hamstrings, and calves, if practiced with good form. As such, you may not need specialized exercises for those muscle groups. If you are using a strength training protocol, squats, calf raises, and explosives should be plenty to give you powerful, well proportioned legs. If you want to use a bodybuilding protocol, design your workout around exercises that emphasize particular muscle groups. Keep in mind that, for most people, the calves are primarily made up of slow twitch muscle fibers, which can work for a long time before tiring out. As such, you will need to use relatively high reps for your calves, even if you are using a strength training protocol.

**Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Bridging for time (to warm up the legs a little more and to open up the back)

Two warmup sets of a squat variation that is easy for you personally

(At least 1 level down in the progression you're working on)

Deep stretches as needed

At least deep runner's stretch and/or a few Yoga stretches

**Work sets**

Squats - usually at least one type of bodyweight squat and a sandbag squat, or a few types of bodyweight squats

Calves - various calf raises, squat jumps

Hamstrings - glute-ham raises, bridge curls

Quadriceps - sissy squats, duck walks, etc.

Back work - Full bridge work

2-3 warmup sets with light sandbags, partner resisted exercises, or park bench lifts

2-5 short work sets (such as with moderate to heavy sandbags, or harder partner resisted exercises)

Explosives - sprints, hill sprints, jumps, etc.

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Upper body pushing** - chest, shoulders, and triceps emphasis

Pushups, dips, and handstand pushups work basically all of the upper body pushing muscles. Any one of these could be its own workout, or part of a full body workout, which are both valid options when using a strength training protocol. These three types of pushing movements work nearly all of the upper body's pushing muscles, but emphasize certain muscle groups. Pushups - pectorals and triceps; parallel bar dips – lats, triceps, and pectorals; single bar dips - pectorals, but also triceps to a good degree; chair / bench dips – triceps.

**Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Bridging for time

Deep stretching as needed

**Work sets**

Do at least 1 or 2 warmup sets of a type of movement before performing the work sets for it; use an exercise that is 1 or 2 levels down in your chosen progression from the “work set” exercise. Rep ranges for the warmup sets will depend on your conditioning level and goals.

Pushups -

At least two types. Once you learn some progressions for pushups, you will have a lot to choose from. Work towards one arm pushups and Jowett pushups.

Jowett pushups - tutorial video: <http://goo.gl/o4CIn7>

Dips - Parallel bar dips, bench / chair dips, and/or horizontal bar dips

Triceps exercise - Tiger bend variations, etc.

Fingertip training

Hand-balancing and/or handstand pushups of any kind

Deep breathing and mobility exercises

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired



Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Upper body pulling** - back, biceps, forearms emphasis

Pullups and horizontal pullups target the upper body pulling muscles in different ways, and progressions for these may be all you ever need when using a strength training protocol. Potential strength workouts include pairing vertical and horizontal pulling movements, including one or both types in a full body strength routine, and having them as separate workouts. Training goals should determine how you program these movements into your weekly cycle(s).

If you are using a bodybuilding protocol, add exercises that emphasize certain muscle groups more, such as close grip underhand pullups to target the biceps. Add in levers that hit the shoulders (side, front, and/or back levers, for example). Lever training by itself can be a full body workout if desired, or part of a workout, depending on what parts of the body you're emphasizing.

**Workout template on the next page**

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Upper body pulling, page 2****Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Bridging for time

Deep stretching as needed

**Work sets**

Do at least 1 or 2 warmup sets of a type of movement before performing the work sets for it; use an exercise that is 1 or 2 levels down in your chosen progression from the “work set” exercise. Rep ranges for the warmup sets will depend on your conditioning level and goals.

Two types of pullups

Horizontal pullups (bar or rings)

Biceps work

Grip work

Lever work is optional; the inclusion of levers and types of levers used depend on goals

**Back work** - Full bridge work

2-3 warmup sets with light sandbags, partner resisted exercises, or park bench lifts

2-5 short work sets (such as with moderate to heavy sandbags, or harder partner resisted exercises)

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Specialization and skill work****Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Deep stretching as needed

Two exercises from calisthenics progressions that are similar to the ones you're working

**Skill work**

Choose a few skills to work from the below categories:

Muscleups

Lever (back, front, side, elbow)

Midsection holds

Hand balancing (hand walking, transitions, one arm work, and so much more)

Bridging, Backbends and/or other tumbling skills

Advanced pushups, pullups, squats, or abdominal work

(Any of these can be its own workout, as well!)

**Specialization work**

Extremities (neck, fingers, forearms, wrists, calves)

Emphasis on one or more particular muscles

Specialization in a particular category of skill work or a particular skill

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Full body routine****Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Bridging for time

Deep stretching as needed

**Work sets**

"Century Test" (to be done in 8 minutes or less, but all 100 reps must be done with good form

- 40 squats, 30 pushups, 20 hanging knee raises, 10 pullups)

Handstand pushups

Horizontal pullups

2 bench lifts or sandbag lifts - 1 push and one pull or two sets of a "complex" (such as shouldering a sandbag then squatting and pressing it, and repeat for the other shoulder)

1 or 2 skills / specializations that heavily work the abdominals (any levers, flags, and/or late progression leg raise movements)

Fingers / wrists / grip

**Work sets – variation**

Do 1 or 2 warmup sets of each type of movement before doing the work sets; use an exercise that is 1 or 2 levels down in the progression from the “work set” exercise.

Horizontal push; vertical pull; abdominals; legs

**Work sets – variation 2**

Same recommendation as previous variation.

Vertical push (dips, handstand pushups, etc.); horizontal pull; abdominals; legs; bridges

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired

Variations on this template can be used to great effect for beginner and intermediate athletes.

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Abdominal training, page 1**

The abdominals are involved in a lot of lifts and calisthenics movements, so you may or may not need to emphasize them. Still, it is highly recommended to train your abs specifically, especially if you're into martial arts, gymnastics, and so forth. The abdominals are very resilient and tend to require higher reps. However, don't make the mistake of thinking you need a ton of different moves to work the abs – they are designed to work as a cohesive unit. Use movements that work the entire midsection!

If you're using a strength training protocol, choose one or two progressions to specialize in for at least one training cycle. Of course, one may also use other progressions in one's workouts, but these will depend on personal goals, needs (such as for a particular sport), and current level of conditioning. For your primary progressions, work high sets of low reps with the most difficult exercises you can perform from those progressions (with good form, of course). The other progressions you choose can be used for assistance exercises or help round out a full body workout that has an abdominal emphasis. (Such as adding lever work, which hits multiple muscle groups, and can often be used to target the midsection.)

For a bodybuilding routine, the goal is still to exhaust the muscles, which means low sets of high reps. One may superset an abdominal movement with a short stretch period and/or bridging, for example, or pair an abdominal movement with a midsection hold, or do all 3 back to back.

Lastly, one can perform an abdominal workout by itself, or add ab work as a finisher to another workout.

Program Design for Advanced Athletes continued**Abdominal training, page 2****Warmups**

Cardio, light stretching, prehab

Bridging for time

Deep stretching as needed

**Work sets**

Do at least 1 or 2 warmup sets of a type of movement before performing the work sets for it; use an exercise that is 1 or 2 levels down in your chosen progression from the “work set” exercise. Rep ranges for the warmup sets will depend on your conditioning level and goals.

Choose from the following progressions, depending upon goals and current level:

Dragon flags

Situps

Leg raises

Levers that can target the abs (such as front, back, and side levers)

Midsection holds (sits, planks, hangs, etc.)

**Cooldowns** (if desired / needed)

Deep breathing, joint circling, stretching (especially for the muscle groups you worked)

Massaging of muscle groups you worked (use a muscle rub such as Icy Hot© if needed)

Light walking / cardio if desired

### Calisthenics Exercises using Benches

#### **Squats**

Split squats with front or back foot on the bench

One leg squats with working leg standing on the bench and the other on the floor

Self assisted two leg squats or pistol squats

Jumbo shrimp squats

Partial ROM (range of motion) squats - back facing bench - sit down to bench and stand up (using one leg or two)

#### **Posterior chain**

Partner or solo prone hyperextensions on the bench

Cross-bench Superman

Angled bridge

Bridge curls (one foot or two)

#### **Abdominals**

Knee tucks, flat or sitting

Leg raise variations, including scissors

Bent leg hold - between two benches or using a pair of pushup handles or parallettes on one bench

L-sit progression - same as above

#### **Pushing movements**

Incline and decline pushups - on palms, knuckles, wrists, or fingers. If you're working wrist or finger pushups, you can have both hands touching the ground in the same way (such as on the back of the hand or on the fingertips), or in mixed positions, to make it easier (one hand on the palm, the other on the back of the hand or fingertips). Also, one can use one hand, both hands, or a transitional movement (such as archer pushups, uneven pushups. or self assisted one arm pushups).

Calisthenics Exercises using Benches continued

Jowett pushups - can be done with feet on bench and hands on chairs or benches. This exercise allows for a much deeper range of motion and provides a good stretch under tension for the pectorals and deltoids, as the chest will go between the chairs or benches. This is a brutal exercise, but it's also a wonderful chest builder.

**More pushing movements**

Elevated pike handstand pushups  
Bench dip variations

Bodyweight extensions - one or two hands; standing or kneeling  
Tiger bend pushups - incline, decline, or elevated pike position

**Holds**

Planks - incline or decline; bent arm or straight arm; one leg or both legs; gecko plank (one arm up and opposite leg up)

Elbow lever - decline or raised. These are both easier than practicing a full elbow lever, in which you are supporting your entire body weight on your hands.



### Calisthenics Exercises using Benches continued

#### **Dragon flag progression**

Don't start this progression until you've accumulated a high degree of proficiency with leg raises and hip thrusts. Be sure to get some formal instruction on this exercise, as it is highly technical.

1. Dragon flag negatives. Lie flat on the bench, reach back with your hands, and grip the end of the bench. The shoulders will act as the fulcrum point for "leveraging" the body upwards. Kick up or leg raise and thrust into the top position then lower as slowly as you can into the bottom position. The top position will look very similar to the candlestick position in gymnastics. The goal is to lower under control until your feet are an angle of about 30 to 45 degrees to your bench. This will be the bottom position. As your form improves, add range of motion until you can nearly touch the bench with your legs while using control.

When you come out of the hold, land softly under control. If you're having a hard time controlling the movement, have a spotter help you on the way down and cue you to keep your hips locked during the negative (the lowering phase). Throughout the entire negative, you will need to maintain full body tension, control your breathing, and keep your hands, shoulders, and hips locked in. Gradually build up your repetitions. This exercise could be done at the end of a workout, especially on days that you're heavily training abdominals.

Once you have built up reps, gradually tighten up form. Once you feel comfortable, practice holding the bottom position for time, and build up to at least a ten second hold.

2. Dragon flag tucks. Lock in your hands and shoulders, tuck your feet in close to your hips, then slightly bridge up by pushing through the feet. You will need to get your hips straight and locked in. Take a deep breath and squeeze the abs tight while maintaining the tension in the arms, shoulders, hips, and glutes. Start raising your knees up while keeping the hips locked in straight and squeezing hard with the arms and abs. At the top position, straighten the knees. Lower under control and hold the bottom position for a few seconds, then bend your knees and place your feet back on the bench, and repeat the exercise for reps. Once you've built up your reps in this exercise, tighten up form.

Calisthenics Exercises using Benches continued

3. Dragon flag - fully locked. Your knees will be locked out straight throughout the entire movement. Start with very low reps, but very high concentration and intensity. Again, ask a spotter to help if needed while you're building your strength in this movement. As you improve, add a rep here and there. Continue tightening up form. As you improve, start making each rep longer and more intense.

### An Essay on Flexibility

As a martial artist with many years of experience, I have had the good fortune of learning and testing out many kinds of stretching. I have found that it is important to have a variety of “active flexibility” stretches where one uses muscular control to help affect the range of motion of the stretching technique. Yoga and Pilates postures have been very effective for me and my martial arts students in helping “open up” not only the hamstrings and shoulders, but correct postural problems in our backs and help strengthen the back muscles while doing so. This is very desirable for practicing martial arts, and for many types of resistance training. I can imagine that performing many types of Olympic lifts would be greatly assisted by improving one’s posture, back strength, and spinal health.

Static stretching, from my experience, is not conducive to resistance training, which is supported by research. I have found that performing dynamic stretching – joint rotations and so forth – form an integral part of any warmup routine. This is very important for warming up the joints and muscles that are specific to the workout, and it also lubricates the joints with synovial fluid, allowing for improved function of the joints.

This is necessary for skill work such as in martial arts, gymnastics and so forth, as well as resistance training of almost any kind. As an example, before we train any Aikido techniques, we carefully practice wrist rotations and wrist stretches. These help prevent injury to the wrists when practicing the various wrist lock techniques, and the stretches also help us to further ingrain the motions of the techniques. In this way, such stretches have “joint specificity”. There are many examples of such joint specific stretches that assist in martial arts techniques.

As far as resistance training goes, we have indeed found that it does contribute to increased joint flexibility. I previously mentioned Yoga and Pilates. These disciplines do tend to help build strength throughout the full range of motion of the exercises, as well as balance and posture. Similarly, other disciplines of body weight movements have been very helpful in not only building strength in “natural” movements, but balance, coordination, and agility. Such movements include various pushing, pulling, and squatting exercises, and many more.

As an example, I generally start most new, untrained karate students with a short list of Judo style stretches and kneeling pushups, or wall pushups if necessary. Such pushups are fairly remedial exercises that allow students to learn the basic form, and help stretch out the muscles and joints while using the muscles to stay in control of the motion. Developing muscular control is a very important concept in both flexibility and martial arts. There are remedial variations of almost any exercise one can imagine, especially in calisthenics. The position, leverage, and range of motion may be adjusted in any calisthenics technique such that it can be made more difficult (progressing the technique) or less difficult (regressing the technique).

Of course, during pushing movements, the antagonistic muscles hold some tension, and the stabilizer muscles also get some training via holding correct posture and balance. Once a set of pushing movements is completed, pulling movements are practiced to help stretch out the muscles and joints on the other side. An example remedial exercise for pulling is standing pulls, where one places one’s hands on either side of a pole, beam, or any other

An Essay on Flexibility continued

sturdy object or piece of furniture that one can safely put one's hands around.

As the student progresses in muscular control, his or her technique improves and will be able to perform more "high quality" repetitions. Also, as the student continues practicing these techniques, his or her range of motion will generally deepen, allowing him or her to make the exercise more difficult, as well as improve his or her own active flexibility. An example is performing wide stance body weight squats half way down at first. This functions as not only a resistance exercise, but also a stretch for the quadriceps where most of the muscles of the legs are involved in the exercise.

Another great exercise is body weight calf raises. These help stretch out the calf muscles as well as the Achilles tendon. Any menu of squats and calf raises is greatly supplemented by ankle rotations and "runner's stretches" (similar to lunges). As flexibility and muscular control improve in calf raises, one can practice them with one foot and / or off a step. Of course, it takes time and dedication with squats and calf raises to build up balance, and flexibility in the ankles. The key point is not to rush things and gradually develop the flexibility needed to keep the heels planted in the bottom portion of squats. Calf raises and ankle rotations help immensely with this.

Naturally, connective tissues will get stretched and strengthened by practicing such techniques. Simply holding tension (via muscular control) will work the ligaments and tendons. Also, going through the proper ranges of motion in these techniques stretches them and helps one's body learn correct movements and postures. As such, not only can one build muscular control, posture, balance, general proprioception and kinesthesia, flexibility, and skill, but joint integrity and strength in ligaments and tendons. This helps maintain joint health and prevent injury.

Maintaining strength balances in the body allows one, also, to maintain natural ranges of motion. Asking any gymnastics coach about building shoulder health and flexibility will certainly yield much useful advice on the topic. It can be argued, especially from a gymnastics perspective, that excellent upper body flexibility is required to learn more advanced body weight techniques. Also, to quote an article by a gymnast, "Keeping the shoulders (glenohumeral / scapular articulations) operating optimally is the key to bodyweight strength success."

Referenced article - "The Fundamentals of Bodyweight Strength Training"

<http://goo.gl/wMnOVI>

Light, gentle stretching as a part of cool downs has helped me and my martial arts students reduce post workout pain. This usually involves partner assisted stretching and massage to help "detox" the affected joints and muscles of waste products and so forth.

An Essay on Flexibility continued

So, as you can see by my approach to body weight training, calisthenics can be very holistic in nature, help with flexibility, and provide light, moderate, and even very high levels of intensity for strength training. My overall approach to strength and flexibility is based around my years of experience in martial arts, progressive calisthenics, and gymnastics, as well as experience and research into other disciplines (ballet, parkour, Yoga, Pilates, etc.), and training with other instructors.

One arm pullup training

One arm pullups are an impressive feat of strength, and take a lot of dedicated training to work up to. You don't need any specialized equipment, either – just your own bodyweight, knowledge of progressive principles and exercises, and a horizontal bar. Progressive calisthenics, a strength oriented approach to bodyweight training, focuses on minimalism – little to no equipment, but high rewards. Your body is its own very versatile form of training equipment!

With all of this in mind, let's explore how to work towards one arm pullups. Firstly, I'll recommend two books and a certification that are invaluable for calisthenics enthusiasts, martial artists, and coaches. Secondly, starting on the next page is a description of a useful strength training method as well as my own progression towards them. Lastly is a potential progression.

The first Convict Conditioning book – which sparked the resurgence of interest in progressive calisthenics - has an amazing progression for pullups, which helps lay out a plan for training towards one arm pullups.

<http://astore.amazon.com/convictconditioning-20>

The book Overcoming Gravity has charts, gymnastics based progressions, diagrams and explanations of the skills, and a ton more information. Check out the product page, which includes a PDF of the book, and gymnastics rings. I don't make a cent from any purchases made through this page – I just think a lot of their products!

<http://shop.eatmoveimprove.com/collections/products/>

There are PCC (progressive calisthenics certification) workshops held regularly around the world. Paul “Coach” Wade, author of Convict Conditioning, teamed with the Kavadlo brothers to develop the PCC, which is the industry standard of bodyweight certifications. The sheer amount of material covered in these workshops and the level of instruction are amazing! I attended a workshop in July 2014, and after a rigorous examination at the end of the workshop, called the “Century Test”, became certified. If you want to know more about these workshops, visit -

<http://www.dragondoor.com/workshops/pccworkshop/>

For a lot more information about progression in calisthenics, check out the other articles further along in this guide. Don't forget to also check out my “Street Workouts” video playlist on YouTube for video tutorials on a lot of the exercises mentioned in this article, and much more! Short URL - <http://goo.gl/QF7mUT>

One arm pullup training

My progress towards the one arm pullup, a useful training method, and a sample progression

-Met the Convict Conditioning progression standard for uneven pullups (step 7 in the pullup progression).

- Improved form and reps for bar and towel pullups, which are essentially a form of self-assisted pullups. Bar and towel pullups are similar to assisted one arm pullups (step 9 in the progression), but you do not let go of the towel in the top half of the movement.

- Had trouble breaking into 1/2 one arm pullups, though, so I started working on the weighted pullup progression in Steven Low's incredible "Overcoming Gravity" - <http://goo.gl/rHFbkZ> However, Paul "Coach" Wade, author of the Convict Conditioning books, frowns upon the use of weight vests. His argument - which I tend to agree with - is as follows.

"They are worse than useless for bodyweight; the screw up form, they can cause aching joints, and they never seem to do what they are supposed to--get folks up the next progression! You are far better finding progressive "hidden steps" in your training."

Coach brought this up when I posted a question in the comments section in one of his articles, which details his own methods and that of his mentor Joe Hartigen, which I have since been applying to training towards one arm pullups.

Article - <http://pccblog.dragondoor.com/the-bodyweight-revolution/>

The Hartigen Method, as Wade calls it, is a 5/4/3/2/1 "ladder" protocol wherein you choose the hardest exercise you can perform for 5 quality reps. Hartigen would often warmup with an easier exercise, for two sets of 5, using slow, dynamic tension to add to the difficulty. What I like about the Hartigen method is the built-in "hidden steps" and tougheners, such as the dynamic tension! The final work set would often include -

"...a ten second dynamic-tension isometric at the top position of that very last rep. He'd follow this with a slow negative of about ten seconds."

I began training the pullup progression as strictly as possible while applying the Hartigen method. The lower rep counts, as well as the dynamic tension and slow eccentric on the last rep, allow one to focus like a laser on form and milk all the strength gains possible out of these techniques. I was eventually able to perform uneven pullups with good form with Joe's system.

One arm pullup training

\*Note – there are others who do agree with the use of weight vests. The argument that could be made for them is that they are an easy way to add intensity to a movement pattern that is already ingrained, and that you can still monitor form if you are strict about it. It is recommended to review the section on training for levels 7 and 8 in Overcoming Gravity. The caution here is that if you're not near level 7 or 8 in your ability, then you shouldn't use a weight vest until you have worked up through other progressions as needed. (Such as the progressions for rowing, pullups, and pullups on rings + one arm chinups in Overcoming Gravity.)

-I applied a 5x5 scheme to Commando pullups, then revisited uneven pullups using the Hartigen method. I eventually progressed to applying this method to Archer pullups. Over time I tightened up form and built up to the full 10 seconds of dynamic tension and the 10 second eccentric at the end.

-I started working self-assisted one arm pullups using a “grease the groove” cycle. Grease the groove is a protocol that essentially involves frequently practicing an exercise while “fresh”, and never going to fatigue when you practice. I had slow but steady progress with this.

While I list this exercise after jackknife one arm pullups in the progression in the next page, “regressed” self-assisted OAPUs can be easier than jackknives for some. Jackknives are the first fully unilateral movement in the progression, which could hike up the strength requirement a bit too much for some athletes. Visiting self-assistance methods are a valid way to “regress” a movement and make progress. I personally “regressed” the self-assisted OAPUs so that I could train through the transition from Archer pullups to Jackknife OAPUs. I kept the assisting arm high at first and gradually worked up to having it at nearly a 90 degree angle to my working arm. Some athletes may not even decide to use jackknife OAPUs at all.

-Short “grease the groove” cycle with Jackknife OAPUs. For some reps, I utilized a minor amount of self-assistance – placing my free hand at a deep angle to my working arm on whatever vertical base was available, and only pushing through the concentric sticking point.

-Aiming to build up to the Hartigen method with self-assisted OAPUs, then revisit the tougheners, and repeat, until I can perform these as described in step 9 of the pullup progression in Convict Conditioning. After that, the last step for this exercise is to build up to the progression standard.

-Try to finally nail a OAPU!



One arm pullup training

Essentially, the Convict Conditioning pullup progression is still very solid, but for most trainees, will require extra steps between Steps 7 and 8 in the progression, as well as between Steps 8 and 9. Below I list a potential progression, with tougheners for some of the exercises. I am not dogmatic about this approach. You're encouraged to add other steps as needed, and you don't have to use all of the steps below, or work with only one at a time. Explore and experiment! It may even be a good idea to split horizontal pullups into their own progression, leading to one arm Australian pullups or even harder variations (such as torquers). Such a progression could include archer Australian pullups, close grip Australian pullups, and more.

1. Vertical / straight pullups
2. Angled pullups
3. Table pullups
4. Australian pullups
5. Jackknife pullups (feet elevated; lower base makes it easier)
6. Pullups
7. Close grip pullups (over time, bringing the hands closer together)
8. Commando pullups (over time, putting assisting arm further from working arm)
9. Uneven pullups (over time, putting assisting hand lower on working arm)
10. Around the worlds
11. Archer pullups
12. Jackknife one arm pullups

\*Feet elevated. To make the exercise easier: bend the knees during the exercise, and/or use a lower base. Tougheners: keep the legs straight during the exercise, and or use a higher base for your feet to push down on (up to having the legs to form a right angle to your torso).

13. Partner assisted one arm pullups

\*To make the exercise easier: your partner can push harder. Toughener: Instruct your partner to only push through the concentric sticking point or when your movement starts to slow down. Make sure you have good communication with your partner to insure safety. However, if you feel you need too much assistance with this exercise, go back to jackknife OAPUs.

14. Self-assisted one arm pullups

\*Hold on to a vertical base with your free hand (such as the vertical pole of a pullup unit). Keeping the assisting hand closer to you makes it easier to push downwards, as does keeping it higher. Tougheners: Lowering the assisting arm and/or keeping it further from you; only push through the concentric sticking point with the assisting arm; use a towel or rope for self-assistance, since either would be an unstable "base" to push downwards on; keeping an L-hold position with the legs during the exercise.

15. One arm pullups

\*Kicking up with the legs makes this easier, but using little to no momentum (keeping the knees locked and legs immobile) will make it harder.

Gymnastics backbend tips

Using a wall for support was the most helpful to me as I was teaching my body how to get deeper and deeper into the backbend. Essentially, I practiced the "wall walking" exercise from Convict Conditioning (step 7 of the bridge progression). Of course, you will ultimately want to teach your body to not rely on support from the wall, but it is still helpful at first as you are learning the mechanics and building flexibility. As I got better at both, I slowly depended on the wall less and less. Finally I was almost nailing it without the wall. Once I got to where I could keep my back arched throughout the motion and stay balanced as I followed my hands, it just took a little more practice to nail it without a wall. A spotter will ideally put one hand under your shoulders and another hand under the small of your back and force you to keep your back arched, if needed.

If necessary, spend some extra time in the bridge and deepening it. Basically just working on the mechanics of the bridge posture. Ideally you will want to get to where you have your feet a lot closer to your shoulders. Also try doing bridge pushups - very slowly with a focus on squeezing out a deep bridge every time in the top position. If you do this with your shoulders facing a wall, you can do a bridge pushup and then walk your way up the wall. (Essentially step 8 from the Convict Conditioning bridge progression - wall walking up). This is just another way to get a feeling for the backbend.

Below is a short link to a YouTube tutorial on step 7 (wall walking down).

<http://goo.gl/of1WFY>

Mobility work – tension-flexibility training

A lot of these are "tension flexibility" exercises that train strength, balance, and flexibility. Of course, like any bodyweight only movement, those particular exercises can be modified to emphasize one quality more than the others while emphasizing the others less. Exercises marked with an asterisk aren't strictly "tension flexibility" exercises, but can be used or modified for that. Lastly, this is not meant to be a comprehensive list. The exercises on this list can be ignored or modified as needed, or substituted with others. I have put together a YouTube playlist with videos of a number of these exercises. Visit the site below, click on "stretching videos", near the top, and then click the play button to watch the playlist – <http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

Strength-led stretches not only help to open up and "oil" the joints, but also train the muscles and connective tissues. Passive, especially forced, stretching – while useful in certain contexts, such as gymnastics, dance, and martial arts – can potentially lead to injury. It also doesn't train the muscles and connective tissues to move the joints throughout their range of motion. On the other hand, strength-led / "tension-flexibility" stretches train mobility – the ability of the muscles to control the joints throughout their range of motion. Flexibility by itself is defined as "the absolute range of movement in a joint or series of joints that is attainable in a momentary effort with the help of a partner or a piece of equipment." (Mobility Training for the Martial Arts, by Tony Gummerson.) All in all, mobility work improves joint health.

The exercise list starts on the next page.

Mobility work – tension-flexibility training

1. Cossack stretches – called spider stretch, by many gymnasts

2. Progression for pistol squat\* (basically one leg squat)

a. Partner assisted one leg squats throughout a full or partial range of motion - go back to doing deep, slow split squats if you're not able to do partials yet

b. Self assistance -

i.) Use a sturdy object to sit on in the bottom position of partial squats. Less range of motion is easier; more R.O.M. is harder - and remember to keep tension throughout the movement.

ii.) Stand on a sturdy object with the working leg and let the non-working leg hang. Be prepared to "catch yourself" on the non-working leg if you're still working on the balance requirement. Push through the object you're standing on with your working leg and aim to straighten the knee, but a partial movement is fine at first with this exercise as well. Steadily tighten up on form as you improve your strength with these. Once you feel comfortable with these, try to bring the non-working leg to where it is parallel to the ground, during the eccentric movement of the squat.

iii) Self assisted pistol squats on the ground - using a sturdy object under your foot or pressing off of it with the hand that is on the same side as the non-working leg. Higher objects are easier, lower objects are harder. Unstable objects also make it harder (basketball, etc.). Remember to take it slow and hold very tight tension on the non-working leg. As you improve, the hamstrings of the non-working leg and the quadriceps of the working leg get a better and better stretch.

c. Wushu squat

d. Transition to wushu squat from Cossack stretch

Mobility work – tension-flexibility training

3. Bridge hold progression.
  - a. Pulling feet in while in short bridge
  - b. Tabletop, straight bridge, head bridge, angled bridge
  - c. Wall bridging, one arm and/or one leg bridge, stand to stand bridge, etc.
4. Cat stretch
5. Twist work
6. Midsection holds (L-sit etc.)
7. Full ROM hanging leg raises
8. Standing partner stretches against a wall.\* These are technically passive forced stretching, so be careful not to go too far – I kept these on the list since the person being stretched can hold tension in the top position of the stretch. The key to not going too far, though, is to only stretch as far as feeling mild to moderate discomfort. One can also try a modified version, where one leans against flat against the wall and lifts a leg as high as possible in a slow and controlled manner, with the goal of locking the knee out.
9. Calf stretches off elevation
10. Lever work on bars

Methods of progression in calisthenics

This is not intended to be a comprehensive article. It was originally written as a “quick start guide” for the gymnastics coaches I work with.

Linear progressions - single, double, triple, or multiple progression.

Most beginner trainees will notice some improvements (higher reps, improved form, what have you) every workout. A double progression consists of only two “intensity variables”: first, build up to a target number of reps in an exercise, then move to a harder exercise or variation of the previous one, and repeat. This is often called “milking strength”, “banking strength”, “paying your dues”, or “building training momentum”. The idea is that you will get as much benefit from an exercise as you can by staying with it long enough to build up to performing the target number of reps.

A triple or multiple progression consists of having three or more variables. For instance, after hitting the target number of reps, you could tighten up form (which makes an exercise harder) or change a hand / foot position such that the exercise becomes harder. Aim for a target number of reps again, and once you can achieve your goal you will move to the next exercise. It's best to focus on only a few variables at once, though, to make progress easier to track.

Stepped and waved progressions; periodization.

Most trainees who have at least an intermediate level of strength are likely to discover that the law of diminishing returns is kicking in, and overall progress is no longer linear. Progress will not come every workout for all of their exercises - maybe every other workout or maybe a little progress every week. This is a “stepped progression” instead of a linear progression. Tighten up form a little here, add a rep there - the main thing is to stay with an exercise but introduce slight changes as needed to keep the training momentum going, even when progress slows.

There will be times, of course, that athletes getting into the higher end of the intermediate level of strength and the lower end of the advanced level of strength will start having trouble adding reps week after week to a moderately intense exercise. This will be the time to start looking into wave progression or other methods of planning training cycles. For more about different types of periodization, point your browser to the short url below. The concepts can easily be modified for use in progressive calisthenics by thinking in terms of “intensity techniques” rather than external resistance. Short url - <http://goo.gl/xAiNBu>

What follows is based on my personal experience with methods of progress. When an athlete hits a plateau on a difficult exercise, explore a few options to see what will help them tighten up form, or make the exercise slightly easier so that they can focus on form, reps, or another variable of the exercise more easily. At the advanced stage of strength, add specialization exercises to strengthen any areas that need attention, to assist progress in an exercise or overall training program / progression.

Methods of progression in calisthenicsA few bullet points to keep in mind.

-There are general guidelines for practicing each type of movement and static hold. These form guiding principles rather than a dogmatic approach to strength, as it is good to be open to new ideas and willing to tailor programs to each trainee.

-Due to individual differences in trainees, we should try to get as much experience and knowledge as we can about the movement chains (pullups, pushups etc.) and static chains (levers, bridges etc.), intensity variables, and long term progression. This will help gauge an athlete's progress, tweak lesson plans "on the fly" during a workout, and so forth.

-No matter what strength level an athlete is at, working towards high reps is still one of the most important ways to develop proficiency and strength in a style of movement. Repetition builds muscle memory, strength, and endurance. Basically, every exercise should be treated like a skill.

-Safety is an integral part of all physical activity, and especially when performing exercises or skills where you leave the ground. As such, safety is a part of the design of progressive calisthenics movements and program design. Holding full body tension in all exercises, keeping an eye on form, and performing all repetitions with a slow to moderate cadence in the beginning stages of training not only help train strength, but also help to build joint health as well as prevent injury. Athletes should be reminded to not over-train or train to injury. Not only does venturing into over training do very little good for strength, it can be an obstacle to building strength, since it often just eats into precious recovery time and can lead to injury, making recovery take even longer.

-Minimalism is an essential aspect of progressive calisthenics. This is why I did not bring up any specific equipment or apparatus. All you really need in order to train for high levels of strength is enough room to spread out your arms, something to hang from, and knowledge of the principles of progression. Of course, using creativity, one can also use everyday objects as makeshift equipment. Athletes should keep in mind, though, that safety is especially important to keep in mind when selecting and using such equipment.

-Strength training provides so many benefits to the human body and mind – including joint health, improved metabolism, beating stress, improved power and speed, help regulating emotions and sleep cycles, etc. - that strength should be the primary goal of exercise and considered the foundation of (almost) all athletic activity. Naturally, this is not the only priority, especially for athletes (whether competitive or not).

-Brief, intense workouts build strength. The longer a training session is, the more it will venture into muscular endurance training. In gymnastics, having a high level of muscular endurance is necessary, but so is building a high level of muscular strength, for reasons mentioned above.

-The technical guidelines for the movement and static chains fall outside the scope of this article. However, I usually go over them in classes and clinics. I do have other articles that detail the performance of calisthenics exercises, though, linked here - <http://goo.gl/kjap97>

Strength Stations Workout for Gymnastics

Choose exercises from the primary progressions to suit individual levels of skill and conditioning. When athletes are working on a partner exercise, they should pair up by size if possible. Rotate partners each set if possible, with 3 to 5 rotations normally being the maximum if the intensity of resistance is kept high. Water breaks every 10 to 15 minutes. “Work sets” on non partner exercises will normally be 3 to 5 at most. This also assumes a high difficulty in the chosen exercises.

Warmups – add in other mobility work and stretches as needed or desired; 10-15 minutes but not so intense that it takes away from the core of the workout.

Choose from jumping jacks, burpees, mountain climbers, jump rope  
Shoulder circles, wrist stretches, bridges, twists, L-sits, and dips from chair, cheese, or block

Stations – choose solo (non-partner) exercises from the primary strength training progressions, as well as partner exercises for push, pull, core, legs, plus basic bridging and hand balance work.

Primary progressions – Pushups, Pullups, Leg raises, Squats  
Handstands and hand balances, Bridges

Additional stations – Toning band pullovers  
Hold bridges, deep squats, or hand balances for time  
Other safe training methods

Partner resisted exercises – Rowing, Overhead presses, Squats and lunges (slow and deep on these)

Partner assisted stretches – pike, straddle, and so forth



Sandbag training for functional, real world strength

Sandbag training is incredible for building functional, real world strength. It is also relatively inexpensive. Sandbags commonly cost no more than \$6 each at hardware stores. An army duffel bag can usually be found at army surpluses for \$15-20 on average. I love training with these because you can do almost any type of lift with them, and the fact that the sand shifts around forces you to stabilize the bags, giving you a harder workout. Sandbag training is very useful for firefighters and combat athletes, such as cage fighters and wrestlers

Try tossing two sandbags into one and try a few lifts – fireman’s carry, clean and press, curls, squats, swings. Or, put one sandbag each in two sturdy backpacks and hold them anyway you like while walking. I recommend holding one in each hand and building up to walking a quarter mile with them. It works the legs, back, and especially the arms. Eventually try bear hugging a duffel bag with two sandbags in it while walking. Build up to 3, 4, or even 5 sandbags in your duffel.

For more ideas, read “Dinosaur Training” by Brooks Kubik, as well as articles on awkward object lifting (which I will link below). Below are two of my favorite online articles on the subject. The first one concisely details the benefits of such training, various odd objects, where to get them, and how to use them. The second article talks about developing “real world strength” through this style of training. My own article on the subject is included later in this book.

<http://goo.gl/tQJii4>

<http://zacheven-esh.com/real-world-strength/>

I have put together my own blog dedicated to odd object training, so please check it out for videos and articles, if you want to know more - <http://oddoobjecttraining.blogspot.com>

Dinosaur Training is essentially a philosophy of "weight training / physical culture promoting a return to traditional strongman types of exercises and training..." Visit the Wikipedia entry for full information -

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur\\_Training](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur_Training)

Or, feel free to visit the author’s website at -

<http://www.brookskubik.com/>

If you are experienced in progressive calisthenics or gymnastics, try wearing a sandbag while performing chin ups, dips, and other exercises. This is one of many methods that can help you progress towards much harder movements such as one arm chinups. There are plenty of other great ideas on using odd objects in conjunction with progressive calisthenics over at this article -

<http://goo.gl/qnYto4>

[StrengthGuidePDF.com](http://StrengthGuidePDF.com)

Sandbag training continued

The blog that the article is hosted on is the official blog of the Progressive Calisthenics Certification community. The certification workshops are organized by Dragon Door, an industry leader in fitness certifications. The certification was developed by Paul “Coach” Wade (author of Convict Conditioning), the Kavadlo brothers (both well known personal trainers, amazing body weight athletes, and authors), and more. If you want to know more about the workshops, or even sign up to attend one, visit below -

[http://www.dragondoor.com/workshops/?F\\_c=35](http://www.dragondoor.com/workshops/?F_c=35)

If you would like to get a headstart on progressive calisthenics, read the full article on the subject that is included in this guide. It also includes recommended books, some YouTube playlists, and more. Lastly, I provide sandbag training as one of my class offerings. If you would like to know more, or contact me for a free consultation, visit this site's home page -

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com/>

### Caveman Conditioning: Uncivilized, Minimalist Training Methods

Caveman conditioning revolves around rather uncivilized and minimalist, but very rewarding, strength training methods out in nature, whether it be the woods, the mountains, wherever. Why bother with a gym or expensive equipment when you can get your strength training for little to no money? Even if the closest thing to nature you have available to you is a public park, you can still get a free but difficult workout by trying some of the ideas from “caveman conditioning”! No matter where you go, you just need some creativity and knowledge of proper exercise technique.

Please note – this article is not related in any way to the “Caveman Conditioning” of Bodyforce. This is my own take on “primitive” training methods, and no copyright infringement is intended in any way. Check out Bodyforce’s awesome Caveman Conditioning page by visiting the blog below and clicking on “Caveman Conditioning” - <http://stuartdorrill.wordpress.com/>

#### Precautions

Dress for safety and for the weather. Always have permission to use the land. (Unless you, a close friend, or a family member owns it – in which case, knock yourself out. If you get yourself in trouble though, “I told you so.”) Take all proper precautions before you go into the woods, including hydration, sunblock, any needed equipment, hiking shoes, thick socks, and bug repellent spray. Read this article on Lyme disease, which can be contracted from ticks (often picked up in the woods during warmer months) - <http://goo.gl/WtO6iK>

### **Caveman Conditioning – Strength Training Methods**

Drag away dead trees by hand. Chop down a tree for firewood. Shovel some dirt. You’d be surprised how great these are for training both strength AND endurance, until you’ve done one of them steadily for an hour. Especially in hot weather.

You can use a relatively low but very sturdy tree branch for pullups, leg raises, various gymnastics exercises, and so forth. You could also perform a burpee, jump up to the branch explosively, do a pullup, drop, and repeat, for a full set.

Run through and navigate the natural obstacle course that the woods provide – this includes jumping ditches. Climb trees for grip work and overall agility. Hang a rope from a tree and learn some rope climbing exercises to train your grip and overall body strength even more. Ropes are also useful in pullup variations and mud run style obstacles. Look into army training and drills for ideas. Look online for the Army Field Manual 21-20 and read it thoroughly.

Clear any straw and or leaves in a particularly shady and grassy area that could be used for various calisthenics – just remember to wear long shirts and pants for this. Also make sure that if you’re going to use the area and regularly, spray it for ticks using Permethrin or another recommended pesticide. Anyway, some excellent calisthenics in such an area include using a tree for support when practicing gymnastics backbends or various handstand exercises. You could also wrap a length of heavy rope around a tree to use for striking practice. Just make

Caveman Conditioning continued

sure you get instruction from a qualified martial arts instructor before trying this and wear hand protection, such as wrist wraps. I recommend using rice bucket exercises to strengthen your wrists, and using other such exercises to toughen the hands. Here is a writeup I did on this topic - <http://goo.gl/NUcLAI>

Picture of a “tree makiwara” - <http://goo.gl/L8Dz7m>

For plenty of great calisthenics tutorials, including some on exercises listed in this post, head over to my body weight training playlist page. Simply point your web browser to the blog below and click on “Body Weight Training” near the top.  
<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

Sprint through an abandoned field – but make absolutely sure you clear a straight path of anything that you could trip over or that could pierce shoes or skin, as well as wear sweatpants and running shoes with excellent heel support. If the woods are in a particularly hilly area, you can go for hill sprints, which are great for explosiveness!

Repurpose materials from abandoned properties out in the woods. This includes using cinder blocks for biceps curls and other lifts. You could also use any old beams, chairs, heavy duty rope, and bricks that are available. Old beams or planks of wood could be laid across a ditch, or used as a calf raise step (put it next to a tree or wall that you can use to assist in balance). Bricks can be used in some hand balancing exercises, and as support in one leg squats. Old chairs can be used for an incredible variety of calisthenics. These include decline pushups, chair dips, gymnastics L-sits, uneven or “lever” pushups (as they are called in the first Convict Conditioning book, but using a chair instead of a basketball), and so forth. You could push your car down a path through the woods, along a mountain path that is not highly trafficked, and so forth. It is amazing for both cardio and giving you a whole body workout! Check out the below video for some ideas.

<http://goo.gl/5rYbJY>

Did you like these “Caveman Conditioning” strength training ideas? Do you have any of your own that you want to share or brag about? Drop me a line in the comments on this article’s blog post - <http://goo.gl/lqNeE4>

View the next article, All About Progressive Calisthenics, for much more about body weight training, including articles and videos.

Great blog post on the official Progressive Calisthenics certification blog, about a similar approach to “hybrid” training methods - <http://goo.gl/qnYto4>

For more ideas on improvised training equipment, and plenty of tutorial videos, head to my related blog - <http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/>

All about Progressive Calisthenics

Body weight training exercises may be trained progressively by adjusting leverage, range of motion, and positioning. With these in mind, body mechanics, and movement, one may use progressive calisthenics to achieve very high levels of functional, full body strength and coordination. This is primarily because calisthenics use natural movements that act on multiple joints, and force many stabilizer muscles to be used. Lastly, calisthenics help to improve posture, as well as build supple strength and tension in the tendons, ligaments, and joints.

**My articles about progressive calisthenics – included in this guide**

Program Design for Beginners  
Program Design for Advanced Athletes  
Calisthenics Exercises using Benches  
One arm pullup training  
Mobility work – tension flexibility exercises  
Methods of progress in calisthenics  
Progressive Calisthenics Lifestyle  
Progressive Calisthenics for Strength  
Ultimate Leg Training  
Calf Training  
Street Workouts  
“Cheat sheets” section

Exercises are also techniques that should be practiced many times and mastered! Short URL to a great article - <http://goo.gl/nxPfzy>

**Progressive calisthenics classes, workshops, and tutorials**

Do you want to get started and learn cool new skills, as well as how to build strength using natural body weight techniques? If so, head to my classes page and click on “Calisthenics Classes” at the top.

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com>

If you want to check out my training videos for some tutorials on progressive calisthenics, visit my playlist site and click on “Owen's Training Videos” near the top. I also have another post with plenty of tutorial videos uploaded by other fitness professionals. To check these out, simply click on the link near the top of the page that says “Body Weight Training”.

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

All about Progressive Calisthenics continued**Progressive Calisthenics Workshops**

Dragon Door, the company who published the Convict Conditioning books, also puts on regularly held progressive calisthenics instructor certification workshops. You can find out more about the workshops at the official Progressive Calisthenics blog that Dragon Door hosts. The blog also has plenty of free articles written by certified Progressive Calisthenics instructors. There is an extensive products section that is linked to at the top of the blog. There are quite a few incredible training books, e-books, DVD's, and more available! The Convict Conditioning books, DVD's, and Ultimate Bodyweight Training Log are among the varied selection.

Official blog - <http://pccblogger.dragondoor.com/>

My blog post about the workshops - <http://goo.gl/QjK4gO>

Also check out my training resources page by visiting the site below and clicking on "Training Resources" near the top – <http://understandingkarate.com>

Progressive Calisthenics Lifestyle

Below are my thoughts about the variables and factors that need to be taken into account for progressive calisthenics.

1. Leverage – increase or decrease
2. Range of motion – increase or decrease
3. Positioning – hand or foot (such as basketball pushups or putting hands closer together in pushups or pullups)
4. Unilateral or bilateral (one hand or both, one foot or both)
5. Correct form!!! It is an art. Be creative, but also have the discipline to go with it. Keep the correct body alignment for the exercise at all times.
6. Other tougheners – seek and find! Inter-set rest, volume, frequency, partner resistance, locked knees while doing calf raises, towel work for pullups, infinite possibilities in hand balancing arts, as well as the use of equipment in public parks.
7. Set S.M.A.R.T. goals – PLAN AHEAD! This also means you should log your workouts.
8. Lifestyle factors – nutrition, sleep, emotional health, recovery days, live clean, but also allow the occasional cheat day.
9. Specializations – only after competency in progressions for the basics. Specializations include neck, forearms, wrists, knuckles, feet and calves, gymnastics holds, odd objects for more full body strength, etc.
10. “Journey, not a destination.” LOVE TRAINING! Consistency, motivation, and creativity in training will fall into place when you relish every rep. Milk each exercise for all of the lessons it can teach you. Savor the gains and let nature take its course.

Summary, and the name of the game – PROGRESSION  
Burn that sole word into your mind and keep it there.

We all have hard days – but take time to “improve the moment”! No matter what, keep moving forward as best you can, no matter what life throws at you. When you go to train, leave your problems at the door and get the work done. Don’t worry, your problems will still be there to keep you company when you get back. But you can get stronger RIGHT NOW. Mentally and emotionally, as well as physically. “Just do it!!”

### Progressive Calisthenics for Strength

Calisthenics are a system of exercise movements which generally do not use equipment. The goal of these exercises is to build strength, flexibility, and physical grace with movements that use only your own body weight for resistance. Calisthenics can boost both muscular and cardiovascular fitness when practiced with enough effort and variety in the exercises. Balance, agility, and coordination also gain a lot of benefit. Popular examples of calisthenics exercises include pushups and pullups.

The approach to body weight training that I teach is known as progressive calisthenics for strength. Body weight training exercises may be trained progressively by adjusting leverage, range of motion, and positioning. With these in mind, body mechanics, and movement, one may use progressive calisthenics to achieve very high levels of functional, full body strength and coordination. This is primarily because calisthenics use natural movements that act on multiple joints, and force many stabilizer muscles to be used. Lastly, calisthenics help to improve posture, as well as build supple strength and tension in the tendons, ligaments, and joints.

The progressive calisthenics for strength approach centers around several styles of movement, which include – but are not limited to – pushups, squats, pullups, leg raises, bridges, handstands, calf raises, lateral chain training (clutch holds, human flag), hanging grip work, neck training, and "active flexibility" (such as L Holds). Of course, any type of body weight exercise may be made progressively harder by adjusting leverage, range of motion, foot and/or hand positioning, and other such variables. Naturally, it is also possible to make exercises easier – which is especially important if you are working around an old injury and want to build up your strength again in particular joints.

The key thing to remember is that progressive calisthenics for strength – like with weight training - boils down to a double progression. The first progression is building up your sets and reps in an exercise that you can work with comfortably. The second progression is moving up to a harder variation of that exercise, but only once you have built up enough strength in your muscles and joints. When you start on a harder variation, you will generally not be able to perform as many repetitions, and as such you will return to the first type of progression.

Progressive calisthenics for strength is more about an approach than a set routine. Everyone is different – you have your own unique body type, goals, needs, metabolism, and so forth. As such, feel free to use the progressive approach to calisthenics to help you develop your own personalized routines. Remember the key concepts to the approach – using the double progression method to build strength and skill in various types of movement, while also collecting knowledge of body mechanics, kinesiology, and "intensity variables" or "tougheners" to adjust leverage, range of motion, and positioning to make the movements progressively harder or easier. There is a seemingly infinite number of ways to adjust your techniques, and continue gaining strength from them for years and years to come.

With all of this in mind, keep experimenting with every possible variable of the exercises you are working on. This way, you will be able to squeeze as much benefit out of each type of exercise. Just remember to keep banking strength and skill in your movements by putting in your sets and reps.

As you practice your exercises, keep in mind that body weight training techniques can



Progressive Calisthenics continued

be treated like martial arts techniques. At first, when you learn a new movement, it is important to take it slowly while getting an understanding of the body mechanics behind the exercise. Then, practice it repetitively to gain skill, strength, coordination, improved posture, and balance in the required positions. From there, you can learn new variations of the body weight exercise – just as in martial arts, when learning variations of different strikes or blocks. Also, improved balance, coordination, and strength in postures help martial arts training. All in all, progressive calisthenics for strength are very useful for everyone into not just martial arts, but athletic sports in general.

Below, I recommend some calisthenics exercises. I list the muscles worked by the exercises, how to basically perform them, and how to adjust different variables to work them progressively. I want to emphasize firstly, however, that to achieve total fitness, calisthenics alone are not enough. Keep in mind that you will want to make needed lifestyle changes in diet, nutrition, rest, recovery, and so forth to help improving overall health in body, mind, and spirit. Scientific research has helped to develop many useful therapeutic modalities. However, we should not entirely discount or deny age old wisdom and practices. This includes yoga, meditation, prayer, solitary hiking – anything that helps you to cope with day to day stress and strengthen your spirit.

Pushups

These work primarily the pectorals, triceps, and deltoids. To perform a full pushup, get into the correct start position. Get into a kneeling position, then bring your open hands up to about shoulder height as you carefully lean forward and get into a hands and knees position. From there, straighten your knees out slowly - one by one if needed. You will want to end up holding your body weight up on your palms and toes. Lower your body carefully to the floor, with the palms still against the floor, and under the shoulders. The toes should be curled upwards. That is the starting position.

To perform a repetition, simply push up with your arms while keeping your body straight, from head to heels. Your elbows should go from being almost fully flexed in the bottom position, to almost completely locked out in the top position. Take a one second pause at the top, then slowly bend at the elbows to allow your body back down to the bottom position. Do not rest on the floor when you come back down to the bottom - you will maintain light tension with the chest and triceps. However, still take a one second pause at the bottom position before beginning the next repetition. As your form and your strength in this exercise improves, do feel free to change the speed of the repetition. I recommend performing reps with a slow cadence - such as a 1, 2 count, a 1 second pause between reps. This way, you force your muscles to hold tension and fight against gravity, instead of using momentum to make the reps easier.

If you're just starting out, working around an old injury, or just want some other ideas on how to build up strength in your joints and ligaments, here are some easier pushup exercises. I recommend starting with wall pushups. Place your palms on the wall, keeping your hands at chest level. Keep your arms straight, and shoulder width apart. Keep your feet together and your body aligned. Bend your shoulders and elbow slowly until you can softly touch your forehead to the wall. Push away from the wall, back to the start position. Do this at

Progressive Calisthenics continued

least 9 more times with good form.

To make this exercise progressively harder, use a chair, bench, bed, solid fencing, work surface, or any other safe object or furniture that will allow you a deeper range of motion. Preferably, it will be an object about half your height and solid enough to hold you up, as you lower and push back up. As with wall pushups, start with your feet together and your body kept in a straight line as you practice this exercise. To get into the start position, lean over and get a hold of the object, with your arms kept straight, shoulder width apart. Bend at your elbows and shoulders until your torso makes contact with the top of the object. Push away from the object, back to the start position. This is one repetition. This type of pushup is known as incline pushups.

Once you feel comfortable working with incline pushups, but do not feel quite ready to master full pushups, try kneeling pushups and half pushups. If you can't complete a full range of motion in kneeling pushups, simply shorten the movement. As you get stronger in this position, you will gradually build up your range of motion. In this way, kneeling pushups help to begin mastering the full range of motion required in a full pushup.

Once you feel comfortable with kneeling pushups, move on to half pushups. Start in the kneeling pushup start position, then straighten your legs out behind you. Make sure that you start with your arms straight, then lower your body until your elbows form a right angle. From there, push yourself back up to the start position. This is one repetition. If you like, you can place a basketball, soccer ball, or medicine ball under your hips to help determine how far down to go. The key is to keep your supporting muscles tight so that your back, hips, and legs will stay aligned. Half pushups help you start building strength in the correct posture for full pushups. Keep trying to increase your range of motion by at least 1 inch each week. Eventually you will be able to perform full pushups for at least 10 repetitions. Remember to always practice perfect form in these!

To make full pushups progressively harder, experiment with various hand and foot positions. For foot positioning, try posting up your feet on a chair to work on decline pushups. Instead of using a chair or other solid object, you could ask a training partner to hold your feet so that you can practice progressively steeper angles. Ultimately, you could build up to handstand pushups with your partner, or using a wall to help support you. The Convict Conditioning approach, discussed briefly near the end of this article, includes a training progression dedicated strictly to handstand pushups.

For hand positioning, try getting into standard full pushup position, then place your hands closer together for close pushups. Because of the increase in elbow flexion in close pushups, practicing them helps to build more strength in your triceps, as well as in the ligaments and tendons of your elbows and wrists. This will prepare you for training towards one armed pushups – widely considered one of the greatest feats of upper body strength.

Once you feel comfortable with close pushups, it's time to start building up to unilateral (one side) work. Get into the top position of full pushups - resting on your palms and toes, with elbows straight, and body aligned. Support yourself on one arm as you put your other hand on a basketball. Stabilizing the ball makes you use your rotator cuff muscles, and strengthen them for later exercises. This kind of pushup – known as lever pushup - will help you to get used to putting more of the burden on one arm at a time.

Progressive Calisthenics continued

Now, before you perform a repetition, make sure you have both arms directly below your shoulders so that you are stable. Keep your weight evenly distributed between both hands, and bend the elbows and shoulders until your chest touches the top of the hand holding on to the basketball. Pause for a second, then push back up. This is one repetition. Be sure to also practice this exercise with the ball under the other hand, to make sure both arms get worked.

If you have trouble using a basketball, try using something solid like a brick for this exercise. As you build strength in this exercise, you can add another brick and start over. Once you feel strong enough in uneven pushups, go back to using the basketball. Try to build up to 2 sets of 20 before moving on to harder exercises, such as half way down one-arm pushups and lever pushups.

Pull-ups

Pullups are a compound exercise that primarily work the biceps, and latissimus dorsi (or "lats" for short). The lats are the largest muscles on the torso, and run from your armpits to down beyond the ribs. Most of the other muscles in the back also get worked by doing pullups. Not only that, your fingers, palms, and forearms are given a great workout by holding up and pulling your body weight as you grip the bar. This translates to building grip strength. Lastly, pullups give your abs and hips a great isometric workout. Because of these benefits, pullups help train the body for hanging leg raises.

To do a pullup, start by getting a good grip on a horizontal bar or anything sturdy you can hang from. Keep your shoulder girdle tight and your elbows slightly kinked in the starting position, to help prevent injury. Generally, with full pullups, you will try to pull your body weight up until the chin clears the bar, and you then lower the body until your arms and shoulders are almost fully extended. If you don't have the strength yet to complete the full range of motion, start with easier variations of the pullup. Also, to work strictly on grip strength, try working on hanging grip work (again using a horizontal bar or anything you can hang from). A simple, natural way to perform hanging grip work is to use one or two towels draped over your horizontal bar.

There are many ways to train pullups progressively, based on a few simple adjustments. To heavily work the lats, try wide pullups. Get a strong overhand grip on the horizontal bar, with your hands separated by about twice the width of your shoulders. Keep in mind that, like any variation of pullups, you will want to hang with your arms mostly straight, and to keep your shoulder blades retracted. You can also bring your hands in close on the horizontal bar for a close grip pullup. Using an overhand grip in a close grip pullup will help train the lower lats, and using an underhand grip will work the biceps harder than a normal shoulder-width grip.

"Uneven pullups" are a variation in which one hand grasps the bar, with the other hand grasping tightly around the wrist of the pulling hand. The elbow of the arm holding the bar should be slightly bent – about 10 to 15 degrees – with the other arm bent at a larger angle. The thumb of the hand grasping on to the wrist of your hanging hand will be just below the opposite palm, with the fingers below the back of the hanging hand. Both elbows will be out in front of your torso. From this starting position, bend your elbows and shoulders, as you pull

Progressive Calisthenics continued

yourself up smoothly, until you clear your chin over the bar. Take a short pause at this top position, then lower yourself slowly back down to the starting position, where you will pause again before beginning the next repetition. Because you are supporting your body weight from one hand during uneven pullups, practicing them help you to begin banking the kind of strength you need for one arm pullups. If you find it hard to keep hold of the horizontal bar, go back to close pullups, to build up your sets and reps. I also recommend practicing some hanging grip work.

Squats

Squats train primarily your quadriceps, hamstrings, calves, and gluteals. The legs are designed to work naturally as holistic, coordinated units. Body weight squats are among the best exercises to train the legs, because they are a natural, functional motion that trains most of the muscles in the legs in synergy. Even the hamstrings, shin muscles, hip flexors, and calves get trained by squats. If you look at the body mechanics of running, jumping, sitting down, standing up, pushing a heavy object, pulling such as in tug of war, you will see they all use bending at the legs and hips – just like squats! Unlike exercises that isolate certain muscles, squats will make your legs work the way they were made to – and not cheat you of the functional strength your legs were designed for!

To train squats progressively, experiment with the positioning of the upper body or the feet, or how close together your feet are when you squat. Let us start with the standard full squat. Simply stand with your feet at shoulder width apart, and squat down as far as possible, then return to standing position.

If you are new to squats or are working around an old injury, start with this simple variation. It will help you condition the tendons and ligaments of the knees, as well as help you to start working on your squatting form. Stand in front of a chair, table, or something similar that comes up to about your knee level. Keep your legs straight and at least shoulder width apart. Bend over at the hips so you can lightly rest your palms onto your object of choice. This will put some of the load onto your upper body, thus making the squats a bit easier on your legs. It also helps maintain balance. As you perform squats from this starting position, try to keep your torso parallel to the floor or ground. Bend your knees and hips until you cannot go any further down. Your hamstrings and calves should reach each other. Your arms will necessarily bend as well on the way down. From this finish position, use combined leg and arm strength to push back up to the start position.

Do not raise your heels at any point, so that you don't bounce during the squats (to prevent injury), and to make sure that the squat stretches out the Achilles' tendon. Having flexibility in that area will help you to master the lowest position of a full squat. If you're having trouble making it out of the bottom position, don't worry! Just try to increase your range of motion a little each workout. Another way is to use a little more arm strength to take some of the load off your legs as you come out of the bottom position. As you build leg strength, you will rely less on your arms.

Once you feel comfortable working with this type of squat – called jackknife squats – start using a sturdy object that is higher than your thighs – such as a desk, back of a chair, or similar. Again, your legs should be straight and about shoulder width apart, with your arms

Progressive Calisthenics continued

out straight, holding on to your object of choice. Keep your back straight as you squat down for the deepest range of motion that you are comfortable with. Gradually increase the depth of your squats as you build strength. Remember to keep your heels flat on the floor.

Once you have built up your leg strength, you will be ready for full squats. If you find that you cannot quite squat all the way down without an object to support you, squat half way down instead – your thighs should be parallel to the floor in the bottom position. Gradually build depth in your squatting. Always keep your back straight when squatting, keep your knees pointing the same way as your feet, and never bounce. Once you have worked up to 2 sets of 30 or more with full squats, you are ready to notch up the difficulty. The squat progression in *Convict Conditioning* recommends working on close squats and uneven squats after full squats. I have used those exercises personally and taught them to my students – they are very useful in building up to one leg squats. I highly recommend picking up a copy of the book for the progressions alone!

I also recommend having a training partner 'spot' you as you start working on half way down one leg squats. Keep the body aligned, with your arms straight out. Your partner will stand beside you and place his or her palms under the arm on that side. Put one foot out in front of you, at about the height of your other thigh. The raised leg should remain locked, and held off the ground, throughout the exercise. Slowly bend at the hip and knee of your standing leg, until the knee is at about a 90 degree angle. Pause briefly and push back up. Your partner should help you maintain your balance, as well as give some assistance in coming back up, by pulling up slightly with her or her hands.

If you do not have a partner, you can stand beside a chair or wall if necessary to help you correct your balance. You can also use hand rails, or the type of rails you see on playground equipment, for support. However, do not rely too much on an external object for this exercise, so that you can still practice the required balance and skill needed to try full one-leg squats. Holding a leg out during work sets helps to further develop your hip flexors. If you have trouble performing half one-leg squats, do not squat down quite as far at first, and gradually add depth each workout. Remember to follow half one-leg squats with full, close, or uneven squats. This will help you keep up your leg strength in a full range of motion.

Once you are ready to start working down to full one leg squats, stand beside something sturdy. The hand on the same side as the working leg will be placed palm down, on the object of choice. I recommend a chair or bench. As you squat down, use the object to help correct your balance. As you come back up, use the hand to help push. As you increase depth in one leg squats, use progressively shorter objects. Work up to using a basketball for support. Pushing off the ball will help you come out of the bottom position. Doing supported one leg squats this way will still give your legs a lot of work, while helping you to build the strength in your ligaments in tendons.

You will want to build up to at least 2 sets of smooth, supported one leg squats off the basketball. Remember to keep them strength-led – no momentum or bouncing! Once you get to this point, you will be ready for unsupported one leg squats.

Don't forget other leg training ideas, such as lunges, bunny hops, duck walking, and hill sprints. For some ideas, refer to my *Ultimate Leg Training* article in this guide.

Progressive Calisthenics continuedLeg raises

This type of exercise works all the muscles in the abs, as well as your rectus femoris. It also gives a good stretch to your hamstrings. You will ultimately want to build up to hanging leg raises, which are superior to situps for 3 reasons – they require less equipment, are more functional, and work more muscles than situps. If you want to build sixpack abs, you don't need lots of high repetition sets or fancy equipment – you only need a good program of leg raises. Simply work them progressively to build thick, strong abdominal muscles. Also, carefully control your diet as needed to trim off any excess weight to start revealing muscle definition.

Now, let us think about leg raises progressively. The easiest way to build up to straight leg raises is to start with knee tucks and flat knee raises. Knee tucks are performed while sitting in a chair and holding on to the sides with your hands. Straighten out your legs, keeping your feet together and raised a few inches off the floor. Bring your knees up smoothly until they are several inches from your chest. Make sure to breath out as you bring up your knees. By the end of the drawing in motion, you should have completely exhaled, and your abs should be very contracted. This is the ending position of the exercise. Pause briefly and then reverse the motion, ending back in the starting position (feet out in front). Don't let your feet touch the floor until you've completed your set, and always keep your stomach tucked in. This exercise builds good spinal posture, as well as build strength in your abs and hip flexors. It also helps to drill the kind of motion that you will need for later variations.

For flat knee raises, simply lie back flat on the floor, put your legs together, and your arms down by your side. Bend your knees at about 90 degrees, and keep the feet a few inches off the ground. Press hard on the floor using your hands if needed, to keep your body stable. From there, bring your knees up smoothly until they are over your hips, and exhale as you do this. Your thighs will end up perpendicular to the floor, and your calves will be parallel to the floor. Pause briefly, slowly lower your feet to the start position, and make sure to inhale as you do this. Keep your stomach muscles tight, and keep your knees at a 90 degree angle throughout the exercise. You can gradually build the difficulty by straightening your legs out a little each workout. Eventually you will be able to perform full straight leg raises.

At this point, you should be ready to work on vertical knee raises. The goal is to slowly build up to doing hanging straight leg raises. When practicing the latter, your latissimus dorsi muscles get worked along with your abdominals. You also get some benefits to your forearms and shoulders, since they are used to hold your weight from the bar.

When you first grab onto the bar, do nothing else until your momentum has disappeared. Your body should be still and your legs straight before you start the first repetition of the exercise. Slowly raise your legs as far as you can. As your abs get stronger you can increase your range of motion in this exercise. If this exercise is too hard at first, try hanging knee raises or flat bent knee raises.

Calf raises

These primarily work the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles of the calf. The anterior tibialis also gets some ancillary benefit, even more so if calf raises are practiced off a step or curb to add depth. The basic calf raise is to stand normally on both feet, in a relaxed position,

Progressive Calisthenics continued

with knees bent. Simply raise your heels such that you will be standing on your toes, and then lower your heels down to the floor again. That is one repetition. Three "intensity variables" or "tougheners" include 1) Standing on one foot, 2) locking out the knees, and 3) using a step / curb to allow greater range of motion.

While progressive calisthenics are still the most effective way to train your calves, a lot of people like to supplement them with weights. I personally prefer to use dumb bells when I want to add some resistance to calf raises. Seated calf raises are also commonly recommended to give excellent work to the soleus muscles. Other ideas for calf training include skipping rope, as well as box jumps. The calves are very important in many athletic sports, and as such, I find that there is no shortage of calf training ideas!

Dips

These primarily work the pectorals (chest), triceps, and deltoids. Dip are generally practiced between parallel bars, or two sturdy objects. The feet are crossed, and the body is lowered until your elbows are lined up with your shoulders. From there, push yourself up until your elbows are almost completely locked out. If you do not have the strength to perform full dips yet, let's think progressively! I recommend starting with chair dips or bench dips. Any sturdy object at about your 'sitting' height should work. Keep practicing until you can build up to doing full dips. Visit the below blog and click on the link that says 'Body Weight Training' for video tutorials on chair dips, as well as other exercises, and ideas on progressing -

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com/>

**My references for this article**

Wikipedia article on calisthenics -

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calisthenics>

Convict Conditioning, and Convict Conditioning II,  
written by Paul "Coach" Wade

Be sure to check out these books for various training progressions that I haven't covered here. These books inspired my approach to progressive calisthenics for strength. The first book provides training progressions for pushups, squats, pullups, leg raises, bridges, and handstand pushups. It provides a solid foundation for the second book, which details progressive calisthenics for the extremities (neck, forearms, calves), as well as lateral chain training, and active flexibility. It also has useful chapters on diet and nutrition, recovery, and good mental habits.

View my review page of the Convict Conditioning books, which also contains a Convict Conditioning video playlist as well as Amazon ordering links -

<http://www.johnstonkarate.com/2012/04/convict-conditioning-highly-recommended.html>

StrengthGuidePDF.com

Progressive Calisthenics continued

The book *Overcoming Gravity*, by Steven Low, details many very useful body weight training progressions based on gymnastics. The progressions have given me a lot of useful ideas on mastering the harder strength exercises in *Convict Conditioning*! The book also has a lot of useful information on anatomy, how to structure your own workouts, and much more. The PDF edition of the book is available here -

<http://shop.eatmoveimprove.com/collections/products>

In the article “Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Body Weight Training Methods”, I detail some ideas on integrating basic gymnastics skills and training with other types of old school calisthenics, as well as martial arts training methods.

Another must-read is Brooks D. Kubik's 'Dinosaur Body Weight Training'. I would have summarized some of his ideas in this article, but the book contains SO much useful information, I simply can't do it justice in such a short article. Like Paul 'Coach' Wade, Mr. Kubik pays a lot of respect to the old time strongmen and physical culturists. His Dinosaur Training philosophy promotes a return to the types of training that they engaged in, including progressive body weight training. View my related writeup below -

<http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/2013/07/dinosaur-training.html>

Visit the author's website for more information about his books, and ordering links -  
<http://www.brookskubik.com/>

Be sure to also read my *In Pursuit of Perfection* series of articles, which detail an outline of my formulation of martial arts and fitness. The articles are included in my karate student guide book – <http://understandingkarate.com/>

Paul 'Coach' Wade has teamed with Dragon Door (who published his books), and the Kavadlo brothers to create the Progressive Calisthenics Certification Workshop and the official Progressive Calisthenics blog. Dragon Door is considered to be an industry leader in fitness certifications. The new blog has many free resources, as well as details on the workshop. Visit my related blog post for links to the relevant pages on the Progressive Calisthenics blog -

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/2013/05/31/progressive-calisthenics/>

I teach progressive calisthenics classes. Visit this page for more information -  
<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com/2013/06/16/progressive-calisthenics-for-strength/>



## StrengthGuidePDF.com

### Ultimate Leg Training

Make sure you have a safe, clear practice area that is at least several feet in length, although at least 40 feet is preferable. Warm up and stretch for at least 10 minutes before any leg training session. Also, do not attempt unless you are already in good physical condition and want to improve your leg strength, stamina, and tone.

The exercises listed are functional exercises that do not require equipment. These exercises build explosive power and stamina in the legs, as well as help drill qualities needed for good footwork in martial arts. Of course, most or all of these exercises should also benefit most athletes. The 3 exercises listed below may be done each day that you work out - unlike heavy weight lifting, which requires at least one day between workouts to recover. Remember to not sacrifice proper form to complete the exercises more quickly or easily.

#### Squats

Start with performing normal squats continuously for one 2 minute round. The goal is to be able to perform squats continuously for three 3 minute rounds, with one minute rest after each round. An alternative to using rounds is to build up to doing 3 sets of 100 squats for each day you work out. Do not sacrifice proper form to complete squats more quickly / easily - you want to feel the burn! For added difficulty, do at least one set of 10 one legged squats, per leg.

#### Horse stance training

The first goal is to hold the stance with proper form for 10 minutes. Once this is achieved, practice sitting in a very wide and deep horse stance (you should be able to balance cups of water on your knees in this stance). Perform at least one set of 10 calf raises in this stance. For added difficulty, add a pair of hand weights to the stance.

#### Duck walks

Completely bend at the knees while keeping the back straight, and the hands up. Step one foot in front of the other without coming up at all. Move swiftly without dragging the feet, or losing balance. The first goal I recommend for this exercise is to be able to duck walk for 3 or 4 minutes at once. A sidewalk may be used for this exercise, but high quality, comfortable running shoes are highly recommended.

#### High Difficulty

Once you are proficient at duck walks, try the following - which should not be done more than 3 times a week. Perform duck walks until failure - again, preferably at least 3 to 4 minutes. Rest for at least 1 or 2 minutes. Perform duck walks until failure again. The first goal is a 20 minute session (with rests included). A very high goal is to duck walk half a mile. For additional difficulty, add a weight vest.

Calf Training

Following my usual line of “little equipment, high rewards” style of training, I’ll be using two planks of wood (which are sanded down and glued together) for calf raises. The calves come into play in most activities that involve the legs, and especially so in martial arts. If you are heavily into martial arts or strength training, your calves may already be in great shape, but at least a bit of calf specialization can provide an extra edge. Doing so also does help strengthen the associated connective tissues (Achilles tendon etc) as well as provide a great way to rehab the ankles.

The gastrocnemius and soleus make up the bulk of the muscles of the lower leg. The former acts on two joints (knee and ankle). If you really want to work a two joint muscle a lot harder, lock out one joint while working the muscle from the other joint. For instance, doing calf raises with locked knees makes them tougher. Increasing the range of motion also toughens an exercise. Thus the use of a step to do calf raises off of. There are many more potential tougheners, such as rep / set schemes, cadence, changing the positioning of the feet, using one foot at a time, adding weight, and so forth.

I always look for ways to make an exercise harder without adding weight. Using your own body weight as the resistance, and adjusting the leverage of an exercise, as well as other tougheners, can yield many years worth of strength and athletic gains. Progressive calisthenics use this sort of approach to build functional, athletic strength! In the words of Al Kavadlo, progressive calisthenics is “an open-ended, individualized fitness modality centered around the concept that one’s own body weight (and the proper manipulation of leverage) can provide ample resistance for strength training, regardless of one’s current fitness level.”

For more, read his full article here - <http://goo.gl/iQnhlJ>  
For plenty of free videos – [martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com](http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com)

Poetry in motion

I suppose I could say that I'm almost religious about body weight training in general, especially progressive calisthenics and gymnastics. It's very Zen when you focus on the bar, become one with it, and your body is just smoothly transforming into the technique you're practicing – whether a gymnastics pullover or whatever! Definitely an art, and poetry in motion, like skating or surfing!

I can understand why skaters and surfers are often almost religious about what they do. I'm always looking for that “transcendent rep” near the end of the set, that I pour my heart and soul into, all of my focus, like finding my way down the rabbit hole and through the other side, only to find myself transformed. Sweating and squeezing out all of my emotions, pouring them onto the bar, floor, mat, wall, or pavement! That is living and definitely a spiritual experience :)

### Kettlebell Training Tutorial

If you are new to fitness, find a local fitness instructor to advise you about the best workout routines and training equipment for your situation. Kettlebell training can be dangerous if you are new to fitness and do not learn how to use proper form. For females a 16 pound kettlebell is recommended to start with. For males, 30 or 35 pounds is recommended.

The kettlebell is an incredibly useful piece of equipment, especially for martial artists. Because of the full body nature of a good kettlebell workout, it accelerates fat loss, packs on lean muscle, and builds explosiveness. The functional training as well as the ballistic and grinding exercises it provides help drill qualities needed for martial arts. This includes helping with power, speed, muscle endurance, stance training, mental toughness, efficiency in movement, and strengthening your core. Also, the ballistic nature of exercises like swings, cleans, and snatches emulate the explosive whole body integration used in performing strikes, kicks, and throws. Overall, the kettlebell is great for training cardio, strength, and flexibility. Strength and stamina in the lower back, legs, shoulders, and grip get quite a lot of benefit from kettlebell training.

Kettlebell workouts include 3 types of exercises. Ballistic exercises are fast, and teach you to generate power in a dynamic fashion. Ballistics normally have a wide range of motion and use a large number of muscles. Ballistics train the muscles as well as the heart and lungs. Grinds are slow and keep tension on the muscle while performing the exercise. Grinds include controlled pressing, pulling, and squatting. These exercises will help you locate anything lacking in your structure and alignment. Hybrids are, of course, hybrids of ballistics and grinds, and as such combine the best of both. Hybrids train you to move between speed and strength, or contraction and expansion.

On the next page, I recommend some of the staple exercises, from which you can design a good kettlebell workout. I included some unilateral exercises, as well as compound and dynamic core rotation exercises. Unilateral exercises are those done on one side only. These exercises improve strength imbalances in the body, as well as train aspects that are often neglected, such as balance. When doing unilateral exercises, you would perform a set with one side, then perform a set with the other side.

Compound exercises drill movements that depend upon on coordinating multiple muscle groups in order to move two or more joints through the range of motion of the exercise. By using compound exercises, you can get a whole body workout that quickly builds muscle, general fitness, and overall body strength.

Some recommended exercises:

- 1) Figure 8 - grind; grip training. At first try performing this for upwards of a minute.
- 2) One leg deadlift - grind; compound exercise; unilateral.
- 3) Sumo squat upright row - grind; compound exercise; uses pulling movement.
- 4) Bridge pullover - great for wrestlers and grapplers; works the core.
- 5) V crunch with kettlebell rotation - dynamic core rotation. Try to perform this for a minute at first.
- 6) Clean / Squat / Press combo. Unilateral. The clean is a ballistic exercise that develops explosive power, tendon strength, and the posterior chain. The squat is a grind and compound exercise that uses multiple muscle groups. The press is a grind that works multiple muscle

Kettlebell Training Tutorial continued

groups.

7) Goblet Squat - grind.

8) Overhead Lunge - hybrid. Perform a set of lunges with the kettlebell in one hand, and then switch hands.

9) Wood Chops - dynamic core rotation. Perform on both sides.

10) Swing - ballistic pull

11) Snatch - ballistic / hybrid pull

**Please Note**

Feel free to research other exercises as needed to help train for your own personal performance goals. Please talk to your martial arts or fitness instructor for ideas on how to tweak your routine. Also, don't forget to visit the kettlebell store if you are interested in purchasing your own. The store also recommends some excellent kettlebell tutorial videos and books.

<http://astore.amazon.com/kettlebellooe-20>

For some excellent video tutorials on kettlebells, visit the site below and click on 'Kettlebell Tutorial Videos' -

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com/>

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Body Weight Training Methods

In this article, I detail some ideas on integrating basic gymnastics skills and training with other types of old school calisthenics, as well as martial arts training methods. Unlike modern calisthenics, which commonly treats such exercises as endurance building activities or warmups, the old school body weight training methods offer progressive training for high levels of full body functional strength and athletic skill. Such training commonly requires little to no special equipment except your own body weight.

I will describe my own personal method of instruction very shortly so that you will get an idea of how I approach body weight training. My methodology primarily consists of a streamlined, integrated system of karate and boxing training and skills, aerobic endurance training, body weight training for strength, and athletic skill work. Integrating basic gymnastics skills and training methods helps to improve and build upon the latter two areas, as well as improve physical ability for martial arts. All in all, gymnastics training assists my goal of creating a complete methodology for freedom of movement and personal self expression.

My integrated system is called Mizuumi ryu Karate. The style is dedicated to the development of body, mind, and spirit, in a holistic manner. Read more about the style and its approach to training below.

<http://mizuumiryukarate.com>

The approach I take to old school calisthenics is primarily based upon my experience in martial arts training, as well as the Convict Conditioning approach. The books available on the subject, written by Paul "Coach" Wade, argue that the human body is its own gym. The books lay out training progressions, detailed explanations and diagrams of the exercises, and information on "old school" calisthenics / body weight conditioning for insane strength. The books also contain history about exercise and old school strongmen, as well as details on warming up, supplementary exercises, workout routines from beginner to very advanced, healing from injuries, and more. After working through the approach and integrating it into my system, I developed my own approach to old school calisthenics. To read my full tutorial on the subject, view the article "Progressive Calisthenics for Strength" that is also included in this guide.

I also highly recommend purchasing the Convict Conditioning books to get access all of the information and training progressions that the author lays out. The books are available in print and for Kindle, and there are some DVD tutorials also available. Visit the page below for previews of the books and DVDs or to purchase them.

<http://astore.amazon.com/convictconditioning-20>

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued

The approach I take to basic gymnastics exercises is based primarily upon ideas from the book *Overcoming Gravity*, and experience in serving as a strength and conditioning coach at a gymnastics studio. *Overcoming Gravity* includes tutorials for higher level gymnastics exercises that can be chosen from. Weighing in at 500+ pages, this book has plenty of solid information in it. It includes chapters on the basics and mechanics of body weight training, constructing your own routines, planning ahead for training cycles (periodization), dealing with injuries, and more. The book also contains descriptions and illustrations of the exercises, details on how to progress in your strength work and skill work. Most importantly, progression charts and summaries are included in the book, which are useful for making photocopies of for quick reference. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, the author gives good advice on getting started on setting goals.

All in all, the book is very useful for people who are new to gymnastics style training, but aren't sure where to start or feel intimidated by it! I highly recommend purchasing the book to get access to all of the useful information in it. There are many years' worth of strength gains to be had from working through the exercises and training progressions in the book.

<http://astore.amazon.com/overcoming-gravity-20>

**Warmups**

Warm up before doing any skill work, by skipping rope and going through a few minutes of various stretches, or any other suitable warmup work. Warming up raises your body's core temperature, which helps improve muscle contraction and activation of your central nervous system. Also, proper warmups raise your heart rate and blood flow, to improve the transport of oxygen and nutrients into your muscles, and transport wastes out. Just remember that your warmup should be only that – a warmup to get ready for the skill work.

**Skill Work**

Since this phase of your workout comes directly after warmups, it is the best time to work on new things and correct existing techniques. Also, skill work helps to warm up the muscles more and reinforce proper technique for the strength phase. If you're feeling fatigued, take a rest, since you need to have the stamina to practice correctly. Refer to the *Overcoming Gravity* and *Convict Conditioning* books, and the resources below for help with the exercises, and progressing to higher levels.

Skill Standards PDF - <http://goo.gl/5TFTTn>

I have various body weight training video playlists at the blog below - <http://martialartspodcast.blogspot.com>

Now, onto the skill work. Use variations of the exercises below, and different set / rep / time schemes as needed, depending on your daily / weekly goals.

### Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued

Handstands with chest facing wall and toes against the wall. See page 276 in *Overcoming Gravity* for an introduction for handstand work and how to train them properly. Keep working on your posture and balance, and strength in holding the position. Open up the joints a bit if needed by doing a few pike headstand pushups. I recommend not holding the full headstand position against the wall for too long during skill work, so as to save strength for the actual strength work. Come back to handstands for isometric training later in the workout if so desired, however.

Once proficient in wall handstands (posture, balance, shoulder strength-endurance), start working on moving the toes away from the wall for at least 1 second at a time. The top priorities at first are developing the strength and coordination needed to smoothly get into the position, and cleaning up your posture while in the position. The proprioception, isometric, and joint training benefits of handstand work carry over to martial arts training.

Frog stand. This is the first step in the planche progression. It will also help develop balance and shoulder strength, which has some benefit for handstand work.

Tuck planche. I recommend feeling it out on parallel bars, such as a dip station or pushup station on a power tower, or parallettes. At first, press the body off the ground as in the upwards phase of a dip, with the knees tucked in. Start setting the body weight forward and try to bring the hips up to shoulder level. Ideally, the elbows will be mostly or completely locked out.

L-sits. Build up to the progression standard listed in *Overcoming Gravity*. Use the pushup or dip station on a power tower, pushup handles, or parallettes at first. Then, progress to practicing L-sits without equipment – such as on an exercise mat or grass. Practice L-sit tucks (or, 'N Holds' as described in *Convict Conditioning*) and practice stretching out one leg at a time – 'uneven N-hold'. Practicing the holds this way helps train your legs, core, and coordination for kicking skills in martial arts.

### **Strength Work.**

As the harder exercises are mastered and enough strength is put 'in the bank', those exercises could eventually be considered 'skill work'. The top priorities, of course, are building up joint integrity and learning correct form for each new exercise or variation. Keep trying to add repetitions each week and take active rest as needed.

I recommend 'daily undulating periodization' (light and heavy days), once you build up to an intermediate level of conditioning. Of course, I also recommend using a push / pull split instead – say, push on Monday, pull on Tuesday, etc. – if that works better for your goals. Play around with rep / set schemes for at least two pull and two push exercises. Needless to say, getting stronger at push and pull exercises helps with many athletic activities.



Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued**Pulling exercises.**

Horizontal pulls – 'rowing'. In the Convict Conditioning approach, horizontal pulls are considered a remedial exercise that help train the joints, biceps, grip strength, and back. Overcoming Gravity details more exercises for horizontal pullup work.

Vertical pullups – using both hands. The pullup progression in Convict Conditioning is a good starting point. Once you have worked up to the intermediate standard on Uneven Pullups (step 7 in the progression), I recommend working on the next exercise as well.

One arm pullup eccentrics. See Overcoming Gravity page 382 for an excellent tutorial. It details a few methods for assisting one arm pullup eccentrics, including the use of a towel looped over your bar of choice. I personally recommend using this training method, in conjunction with Step 9 of the Convict Conditioning pullup series – Assisted One Arm Pullups. There are potentially many years' worth of strength gains to be gotten out of all of the ideas on one arm pullups alone, in the two books. Keep experimenting with the many different ideas as you progress.

**Pushing exercises.**

Pushups on both hands. The Convict Conditioning pushup series is an excellent place to start for remedial exercises for horizontal pushing. Of course, as you work through the steps, there are some exercises that require a great level of strength to perform – starting with one arm pushups, which – of course - I highly recommend building up to.

One arm pushups. See page 452 in Overcoming Gravity for elevated one arm pushups, which is a variation that helps you train for full horizontal one arm pushups. The tutorial in Overcoming Gravity details correct form, and factors that can make it more difficult. I recommend working on this exercise after you can perform at the progression standard for Uneven Pushups, which is step 7 of the pushup series in Convict Conditioning. I recommend using bricks, a step, folded over towels, a medicine ball, or a basketball under the non-working hand for uneven pushups. Maintain strict form in these types of exercises to help prepare for completely one handed pushups on the floor.

Dips. Use parallettes, parallel bars such as at a public park, a dip station on a power tower, or any two sturdy objects that stand at least about hip height. Chair dips are an alternative. I recommend using the 'grease the groove' method for improving on dips if you are new to them. See page 82 of Overcoming Gravity. Working on dips using gymnastics rings will help you progress and master higher level progressions of the planche and other pushing exercises. See the dip progression in Overcoming Gravity.

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued

Handstand pushups – Refer to the progression starting on page 292 of Overcoming Gravity, as well as the handstand pushups progression in Convict Conditioning. Handstand pushup variations all work very well as the body weight equivalent of military presses. This kind of training helps some to build up the upper trapezius muscles and helps to build a lot of explosive strength in and around the shoulders, as well as in the triceps. This provides a lot of benefits for wrestlers, especially, and to a great degree, any type of grappling or martial art with punching techniques.

**Other types of exercises for strength and toughening.**

Below, I recommend exercises for core compression work, the lower body, and the extremities. Feel free to choose from the exercises based upon your goals and the specific activities you are training for. Some athletes use an upper body / lower body split instead of a push / pull split. Also, the extremities exercises I list could be done at light intensity to warm up the muscles to be worked during your work sets. The extremities exercises, at a higher intensity, are – of course – still excellent for building joint integrity and strength in your calves / feet, lower arms (forearms, wrists, hands / fingers), and neck. Lastly, I also make recommendations on which exercises could (or should) be coupled.

**Core compression exercises.**

The core needs to be strong for high levels of ability in any athletic endeavor. Overcoming Gravity does not include much in the way of progressions for core work. The author believes that core exercises should be done as part of your flexibility and skill work training to help improve active flexibility. Also, the author asks, 'Why do extra work on the side and waste valuable training time?' This is because, in most of the upper body exercises, the core is heavily involved in holding and maintaining correct technique. This is certainly true – most body weight training consists of compound exercises. My personal recommendation, however, is to practice dedicated core work on days you do not practice heavy strength work for pushing and/or pulling exercises. This is because it is very beneficial to martial artists, no matter the style you practice. Also, practicing dedicated core work can still help you progress in many other types of upper body exercises. Of course, these are just my personal recommendations. Feel free to choose from the below core exercises as you plan your weekly training cycles, or to skip ahead to the next page for lower body exercises.

Ab wheel exercises. See the ab wheel progression starting on page 493 of Overcoming Gravity.

Leg raises and variations. See the leg raise progression in Convict Conditioning. These exercises, especially vertical knee raises, useful for martial artists. Use the grease the groove method for the early steps, if new to leg raises. This will provide a lot of benefits for any martial art, especially where kicking is involved.

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued**Lower body / Legs.**

It is important to build up the joints, tendons, and muscles in the legs, as they are used in many movements in athletic activities and in every day life.

Squats. See the squat progression in Convict Conditioning. These are useful for training almost literally every muscle in the legs, in a synergistic way. As such, squats are a great compound exercise. Also, when practiced with correct form – with your back straight, squatting down until your glutes almost touch your calves, while keeping your heels touching the ground – squats develop a lot of tension-strength in your stabilizer muscles.

I highly recommend building up to the one leg squat variations. Always be mindful of your joints, though! You will want to be very, very careful of over-training with squats, so that you do not injure your knees. On the other hand, using regular full squats or half squats – practiced slowly – can help you build up the joint integrity and tendon strength and balance needed for one leg squats. This is all important for injury prevention – 'prehab', or prehabilitation. See Convict Conditioning 2 and Overcoming Gravity for lots of information on dealing with as well as preventing injuries.

Lunges. I recommend practicing these slowly at first to get used to them, as well as to stretch out the legs. As you progress with these, your legs will have the strength and flexibility to deepen the range of motion. I also recommend practicing lunges as an isometric posture, to help with stance training for martial arts.

Plyometrics. Once you have built sufficient strength and flexibility in your legs, you will be ready for explosive work. Plyometrics are exercises intended to build explosiveness and speed, and are commonly used for training for athletic activities. View the following article for a lot of great details.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plyometrics>

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued**Extremities – hands, wrists, forearms, neck, calves.**

Fingertip pushups. These work the extensors of the hands. See Convict Conditioning 2 for the progression. This should be coupled with hang grip work. Warm up your hands as recommended in the book. The hands are involved in some way in practically every method of upper body training, and in many activities of every day life, so it is important to train them and the lower arms in general.

Strengthening the hands, wrists, and forearms is necessary for higher levels of training in martial arts such as Judo. Such strengthening is even very beneficial for punching techniques, and especially various Karate or Kungfu style strikes.

Exercises for the wrist. Wrist pushups, knuckle pushups, wrist rotations, rope climbing (where available), doing pullups while holding on to towels doubled over your pullup bar or a tree branch. If you are into Judo or JiuJitsu, be sure to also look into Judo exercises for grip training using your training uniform / 'gi'. Also, some baseball players use 'rice bucket' exercises for wrist training.

If you are into striking oriented martial arts, it's definitely important to develop strong wrists to make sure that your strikes are solid. This is especially important when you are not using gloves to strike, so you can prevent injuries such as boxer's fractures. Of course, you have a greater risk of injury when not using gloves to strike, but if you use correct technique and have developed your wrists and striking tools well enough, you greatly reduce the risk.

Hang grip work. Strengthens the forearms. Also in Convict Conditioning 2. This may be used as a supplement to pullup training. Obviously, a strong grip is needed for any kind of grappling, and strong forearms are also very beneficial to blocking techniques.

Neck bridging. Again, see Convict Conditioning 2 for the progression. This should be coupled with the bridging progression in the first Convict Conditioning book. This type of work has benefits for wrestlers, including being able to hold and transition between positions during a match, as well as having a strong enough neck and back to resist during clinching. Bridge work also greatly benefits anyone involved in striking, as a strong neck helps to absorb the shock of blows thrown to the head.

Calf raises. Once again, refer to Convict Conditioning 2 for the progression. This should be coupled with the squat progression in the first Convict Conditioning book. Having well trained calves is important in many athletic activities. The calves are involved in the push-off in running, jumping, squatting, stepping forward to strike, many transitions in grappling, and so on.

Integrating Basic Gymnastics with Other Methods continued**Resources**

Thank you for reading! I recommend using the charts, exercise descriptions, advice on routines and programming in the *Convict Conditioning* and *Overcoming Gravity* books. The latter also includes a tutorial on sports periodization, which involves planning out various training cycles. Be sure to also look into variations of push, pull, and other types of exercises to help you meet your goals. View the resources below for ideas and other types of advice. I recommend keeping printouts of these in your own training journal binder. This way you will be able to refer to needed information quickly as you log your workouts, make study notes, plan a training cycle, or arrange a routine, etc.

Skill Standards PDF - <http://goo.gl/5TFTTn>

My notes on the *Overcoming Gravity* charts - <http://goo.gl/jk5syU>

Odd Object Training

Odd object training – generally - involves exercise using heavy 'found objects' or implements that you can modify for strength training. Many odd objects such as Atlas stones have been traditionally used as part of strongman training. This type of exercise is nothing new, but it has been coming back into favor recently. An odd object is a non-rigid implement with a center of mass that is not fixed. In conventional strength training, the pattern of movement is fixed, whereas the load given by odd objects will cause adjustments during the movement. Some label this style of training 'real world training', and odd objects certainly have benefits, including versatility, portability, and simplicity. The only limit is your own creativity, as well!

Odd object training used to be done because there were no other options – people either had no access to special equipment, or it simply had not been invented yet. Many old school strongmen also became very well known for using rather heavy odd or awkward objects. Such objects include kegs, anvils, Atlas stones, medicine balls, and sandbags. In this modern era, with all of the scientifically designed equipment and training routines that we can get access to, we can still benefit from odd object training. An increasingly popular philosophy of training – Dinosaur Training – promotes returning to the exercises and training of strongmen.

I have personally found that working with odd objects and the exercises I have discovered for them have helped with coordination, wrist and forearm strength, and more. I ended up getting into this kind of training as a result of reading about the old school strongmen in the Convict Conditioning books written by Paul 'Coach' Wade, as well as reading about the ancient training methods of Okinawan karate in the book 'The Art of Hojo Undo: Power Training for Traditional Karate' by Michael Clarke. The book Overcoming Gravity – written by Steven Low - focuses on basic gymnastics progressions for building strength. Many old school strongmen were capable of great feats of not only strength, but skill and balance. Let's remember that it takes strength to hold many of the positions in gymnastics. As such, I recommend these books very highly. Like with odd object training, the types of training these books describe help a lot with neuromuscular strength and efficiency, musculoskeletal strength, coordination, and more.

On the next page, I recommend some odd objects and other implements that I prefer to use, as well as alternative methodologies. I realize that this is far from a comprehensive treatment on the subject. As such, I do list my primary references at the end of the document and highly recommend that you visit them for plenty more exercises and ideas on constructing your own routines. Also, check out my blog regarding odd object training for links to YouTube playlists about this kind of training and hojo undo -

<http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/>

An Amazon store is also available, which recommends various implements and books -

<http://astore.amazon.com/oddojecttraining-20>

Odd Object Training continuedEquipment List

Don't forget to check out the video playlists linked at the top of this blog, for tutorials - <http://oddoobjecttraining.blogspot.com/>

Old car tires

Have a partner hold the tire so that you can practice body blows on it. Make sure to wear MMA or boxing gloves (or similar hand protection). You can also practice front kicks and roundhouse kicks. You can also modify a martial arts striking dummy or makiwara board by adding a car tire to it. 'The Art of Hojo Undo' illustrates a few ideas. Alternative idea – if you can acquire a used truck / tractor tire and a sledgehammer, there are many drills you can use.

Cinder blocks

Curls, presses, plank variations, wide squats, calf raises, lunges, shrugs, single arm rows, swings, farmer's walk, step-ups, and more! For squats, you can also practice assisted one leg squats – step 9 in the squat progression of Convict Conditioning. Instead of using a basketball or similar object, you will use the cinder block for support as you squat down and 'find' the block with your hand. For calf raises, you can practice them standing on the cinder block. You will stand with on the balls of the feet on the edge of the block and lower your heels slowly, with control. Make sure you have a sturdy chair or other piece of furniture, a training partner, or a wall nearby to maintain a safe level of balance. Check out the second Convict Conditioning book for the calf raise progression.

Where to find used tires and cinder blocks?

Many times, auto repair shops will have plenty of old tires lying around they are happy to get rid of. If you're looking for cinder blocks, try the Freecycle Network - <http://www.freecycle.org/> - or ask friends or local businesses. Abandoned buildings will often have old materials lying around, but investigating such buildings can involve legal and safety issues, so exercise discretion.

Rice Bucket

There are wrist strengthening exercises that you can work using a bucket full of rice. Such exercises are common in baseball and physical therapy.

Heavy Bag

Any boxing, MMA, or similar heavy bag, or a heavy bag of your own construction. You can use different materials to both make the bag and fill it to your desired weight. Keep in mind that if you want your own constructed bag to be useful for martial arts practice, that the contents of the bag are not so hard that they do not allow any 'give' or cushion when you strike it. A heavy bag can be suspended by rope or chains. I would recommend visiting a sporting goods store or asking a local boxing, karate or similar instructor for advice on how to hang up bags. The book 'The Art of Hojo Undo' has a section titled 'Other Tools and Methods', which lists small heavy bag.

Odd Object Training continued

The use that the book lists is as follows -

'Swinging a bag or ball filled with cement and allowing it to land on various parts of the body, conditions the mind and body to the effects of impact.'

There are many exercises you can practice with heavy bags. These include, but are not limited to, slams, squats, and fireman's carry.

#### Rope Climbing and Towels for Hang Grip Work

These make great additions to any grip or pullup training. Rope climbing is common in military style workouts. Like many odd object training methods, rope climbing and towel hangs build strength in the hands, wrists, forearms, tendons, and ligaments. Overcoming Gravity, a book I recommended earlier, recommends the use of a towel in its one arm pullup training progression. Also, the second Convict Conditioning book has a progression for hang grip work that includes the use of towels. The two progressions supplement one another very well.

#### Sandbag training

Sandbags can normally be purchased at a hardware store for a few dollars each, and commonly weight 40 to 45 pounds – making them very cheap lifting implements! You can do almost any type of lift with them, and the fact that the sand shifts around forces you to stabilize the bags, giving you a harder workout. Sandbag training is very useful for firefighters and combat athletes, such as cage fighters and wrestlers. I have personally put sandbags into a duffel bag, which you can normally pick up for \$15 or so at an army surplus. I have written a full article on sandbag training, which is also included in this guide.

My approach to sandbag training is based on the information on the subject in Dinosaur Training. I highly recommend the book for brutally tough, and very effective, strength training!

[http://www.brookskubik.com/dinosaur\\_training.html](http://www.brookskubik.com/dinosaur_training.html)

For free ideas on how to construct your own sandbags for training, as well as the reasoning behind “odd object training”, check out the below article -

<http://www.dieselcrew.com/how-to-odd-object-training>

#### Some other ideas for strength training without special equipment

Car pushing, chopping wood, using monkey bars or rafters for pullups and various gymnastics exercises, using chairs or picnic tables for 'chair dips' and decline pushups.

The “Strongman (strength athlete)” entry on Wikipedia lists various “odd objects” and more in the “Events” section - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strongman\\_\(strength\\_athlete\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strongman_(strength_athlete))



Odd Object Training continuedHojo Undo / martial arts tools

This is hardly a comprehensive list of implements that martial artists use. I simply want to recommend a few that I personally use when I teach. If you want more ideas on the old school Hojo Undo methods, have a look at the below Wikipedia article on the subject -

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hojo\\_undo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hojo_undo)

Now, I will list and shortly describe the Hojo Undo implements that I personally teach and work with. If you would like to view a YouTube playlist that demonstrates this style of training, visit the following blog and click on 'Hojo Undo Videos' -

<http://oddobjecttraining.blogspot.com/>

Lifting Tools of Hojo Undo that I personally use.

Chi ishi – weighted levers or 'strength stones'. A 'chi ishi' is basically a wooden pole with a concrete weights attached.

Makiage kigu – wrist roller. Traditionally, a wooden handle is used, with a weight hanging from it via a length of rope. I personally purchased a modern wrist roller, but the use is the same.

Tan – it is like a modern barbell, and made from a wood post that has concrete weights on each end. I use a steel barbell for the exercises recommended in 'The Art of Hojo Undo.' It is also a good idea to train bojutsu (staff technique) movements with a barbell that is light enough for you to use.

Impact Tools of Hojo Undo that I personally use.

Jari Bako - A bowl or bucket filled with sand, smooth stones, marbles, or even rice or beans. It is used by striking your fingers into it, in order to condition your fingers and fingertips.

Makiwara - a padded striking post traditionally used in some karate styles. I have written up an article about training with the makiwara.

<http://goo.gl/XPOg58>

'Tapping sticks' – almost any piece of wood can be held and used to tap various parts of your body to build a familiarity with getting hit. The point is not to hit yourself as hard as possible, but to slowly build up a tolerance to light striking. I personally use a shinai – a bamboo practice sword used for kendo practice. This kind of tool can be safely used to strike yourself or your training partner moderately hard to the muscles of the legs, arms, and core, but proper cautions must be used.

Odd Object Training continued

Alternatives - there are striking bags available for sale that can be filled with dried beans or shot, which can help condition your striking tools. Wall punch pads can also be made or purchased. You can also use thick phone books wrapped up with duct tape as an alternative to makiwara boards. Also, there are plenty of 'ude tanren', or methods of forearm conditioning. This generally consists of partner blocking drills that can be used to toughen up the arms as well as help with reflexes.

My Primary References for this Article

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur\\_Training](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur_Training)

<http://www.dieselcrew.com/how-to-odd-object-training>

<http://goo.gl/IDS7tx>

Also be sure to check out these two pages to look at training equipment that you can order -

<http://atomicathletic.com/store/>

<http://astore.amazon.com/oddoobjecttraining-20>

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### Old Time Strongmen – Training and Resources

This article was originally posted on the author's Odd Object Training blog - <http://oddobjecttraining.blogspot.com>

The old time strongmen from the 1800s and early 1900s were known for many legendary feats of strength. Many of these feats have not been replicated since! They used many kinds of training that are not commonly known, much less used, in "modern" gyms. Odd object training (such as anvils, sledgehammers, sandbags), progressive calisthenics, and various types of strongman training are coming back into fashion, however. The old time strongmen tended to not let any part of the body slip behind in strength, either - they trained the neck, forearms, calves, every muscle of the body. The benefits of this kind of training include coordination and agility, "all over strength" - power from head to toe, achieving a well balanced physique and a healthy body, building up insane grip strength and bulletproof joints, and well - learning how to do some awesome strength feats!

Some of the types of training that strongmen took up included kettlebell work, sprinting and overall endurance training, the art of hand balancing and other gymnastics style training, lifting barrels, kegs, and sandbags; there were even mental training methods used. Compound lifts such as deadlifts, presses, snatches and other such "big movements", many of which are still used today, were also trained. The old time strongmen were indeed into many different types of training that would benefit them in some way. Of course, they also understood the importance of recovery and proper nutrition. They also understood that you don't necessarily have to go through super long, protracted workouts every single day to become insanely strong, or machines, or a gym. The most important things are to understand proper exercise techniques to work each part of the body, how to work at enough intensity to force the body to adapt, with enough frequency to produce lasting gains.

Of course, dedication to the training and a long term outlook are also among the most important factors. Never rush your training - milk each exercise for all the strength gains you can possibly get out of it before moving up in intensity or load. As you progress in your training, whatever type of training you are into, remember to plan ahead. The more advanced you become, the more important it is to adjust frequency (how often you train, or how often you perform particular workouts), volume, exercise selection, intensity, and other factors.

Here is a list of the many types of strength feats strongmen were known for, and fortunately the knowledge of training methods for these is still around. The below webpage links out to articles that describe these feats. YouTube videos, as well as books and DVDs are available through this page.

Feats of strength - <http://legendarystrength.com/feats-of-strength/>

See the next page for a quick list of useful resources on the old time strongmen and their style of training. (Books, videos, and more.)

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Old Time Strongmen – Training and Resources continued

Resource List

Useful PDF books on the art of hand balancing -

<http://goo.gl/HCndtC>

<http://goo.gl/tW3XJM>

<http://goo.gl/V8yGGE>

I own an official print edition of Hand-Balancing for Muscular Development by Bill Hinbern, and I highly recommend it -

<http://goo.gl/Wt4ibG>

Some other very useful links -

<http://jasonferruggia.com/arthur-saxon-on-conditioning/>

<http://www.sandowplus.co.uk/>

<http://www.oldtimestrongman.com/products>

<http://www.oldtimestrongman.com/strength-articles>

<http://legendarystrength.com/?s=strongman>

[http://www.functionalhandstrength.com/grip\\_articles.html](http://www.functionalhandstrength.com/grip_articles.html)

<http://astore.amazon.com/oldtimestrongman-20>

Be sure to also check out the YouTube playlists I put together for odd object training and hand balancing. Simply point your web browser to my video blog's URL below, then click on "Full List of YouTube Playlists" near the top, where you will find links to these playlists and more -

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

Dinosaur Training - Lost Secrets of Strength and Development:

<http://www.brookskubik.com/>

"MASTER THE TRAINING SECRETS OF THE STRONGEST MEN WHO EVER LIVED - AND BUILD MORE STRENGTH, POWER AND MUSCLE THAN EVER BEFORE!"

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Street Workouts - minimalist training, anywhere!

My references for this article:

On Street Workout by Danny Kavadlo

<http://pccblogger.dragondoor.com/on-street-workout/>

Street workout – Wikipedia article

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street\\_workout](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_workout)

My street workout photo gallery on Google+

<http://goo.gl/QokT6R>

A “street workout” involves practicing minimalist calisthenics and athletics in outdoor parks and public facilities. Street workouts can be very difficult and effective, without requiring a single cent – your body is the only machine you need! Not only can it be healthy and beneficial, it can also be done almost anywhere with some creativity and knowledge of the principles of progression.

The modern fitness industry preaches isolated movements, useless gadgets, and expensive machines, and ineffective training methodologies. Don’t fall into this trap! One does not have to spend a cent on gadgets, machines, overpriced supplements, or gym memberships. Also, instead of isolating muscles, such as leg extensions, learn to use them together with compound movements that use the body as a cohesive unit, which is how it was designed to work. By recruiting more muscles, you build greater overall strength and improve neuromuscular efficiency, which is essential to athletics. Strength is a skill – just look at gymnasts!

The artistry and freedom of personal expression in street workouts is another great, and very satisfying, benefit. It’s gratifying and impressive to be able to pull off a human flag, gymnastics style pullover, or other high skill / high strength moves almost anywhere! Street workouts, while often very difficult and rewarding, are also a lot of fun! What’s better than going outside and having a sense of play about your workout? Lastly, there is also a great sense of community and kinship amongst street workout enthusiasts. It’s amazing and rewarding to be able to share the adventure and creativity with your “bar brothers and sisters”!

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Street Workouts continued

There is an endless variety of exercises one can practice in a street workout. It is only limited by your imagination, knowledge of progression, and where you find yourself. There is a lot in common with progressive calisthenics – many different dynamic movements (pullups, dips, squats, etc.) and static holds (levers, bridges, etc.) are practiced.

***Exercises***

I have put together a video playlist on YouTube that has great tutorials for many of the exercises listed in this article!

<http://goo.gl/yEXUoo>

**Calisthenics**

*Pulling exercises and other uses for bars*

Hand rails, monkey bars, jungle gyms, parallel bars, and even overhead bars in batting cages can be used for many, many exercises. These include grip training, various types of pullups, pullovers, rollovers, dips on parallel bars or a horizontal bar, front lever and back lever variations, variations of hanging leg raises, and other types of ab work.

Hand rails are great for horizontal pullups, aka Australian pullups, inverted rows, and bodyweight rows. Hang grip holds can be practiced from any bar that you do pullups on. Monkey bars are amazing for building a powerful, explosive grip as well as athletic skills, especially for events like the Spartan Race. Check out the below video for some great progressions. If you don't have a ball like the one in the video, you can practice hanging leg raise variations instead to strengthen the lateral chain.

Monkey bar work

Leg raise variations, including rollovers and skin the cat (a variation of back lever)

Muscle ups

[StrengthGuidePDF.com](http://StrengthGuidePDF.com)

Street Workouts continued

*Pullup variations*

I have also written up a quick start guide to minimalist calisthenics style grip training, which is located here -

<http://goo.gl/cgSpni>

Check out the group Barstarzz for inspiration on bar exercises.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/OfficialBarstarzz>

One arm pullup progression playlist by Francesco Vaccaro -

<http://goo.gl/vQ34iS>

*Various flags – clutch flag, human flag, dragon flag*

Clutch flags and human flags can be practiced anywhere you can find a sturdy horizontal base that you can wrap your arms or hands around, such as light poles, smaller trees, playground equipment, and so forth. Dragon flags can be practiced anywhere you can find a bench. Flags are amazing for building overall body strength, especially in the lateral chain, shoulders, arms, and abs.

Al Kavadlo has some excellent tutorials on flags on his YouTube channel -

<http://goo.gl/SC7NZa>

*Pushing exercises*

Dips, pushups, handstand pushups

Dips can be practiced on parallel bars, between two sturdy objects – such as park tables or chairs, or using a single chair or table. There is a seemingly infinite number of pushup variations. Some of my favorites are deep pushups, decline pushups, weighted pushups, one arm pushups, and partner resisted pushups. A variation of decline pushups is called Marion pushups, where you get into a pushup position with your feet against a wall. To make the exercise harder, move your feet a little further up the wall.

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Street Workouts continued

Once you have built up strength in pushups, start exploring ways to move to unilateral work (one arm pushups) and/or planches.

Work up to HSPUs (handstand pushups) by putting time into pushups and basic hand balancing skills. Here is an example progression.

Close / diamond pushups – build up to 2 sets of 15-20 or 3 sets of 8-12

Frog stand – build up to 30 seconds

Tripod – build up to 30 seconds

Headstand against wall – build up to a minute

Pike handstand – build up to a minute

Pike handstand with feet elevated – build up to two minutes

Handstand against wall – build up to two minutes

One-half pike handstand pushups – build up to 2 sets of 15-20 or 3 sets of 8-12

Pike handstand pushups – same

Pike handstand pushups with feet elevated – build up to 2 sets of 12-15 or 3 sets of 8-12

One-half handstand pushups against wall – same as above

Perform HSPUs against the wall at first or with a spotter. Do them with hands at shoulder width until you build up to at least 2 sets of 12 -15 or 3 sets of 8-12.

*Hand balancing*

I have a YouTube playlist specifically for hand balancing -

<http://goo.gl/IYKDvV>

Short list of ideas for hand balancing, which are covered in the playlist above:

Frog stand, headstand, handstand, handstand to bridge, wall walking to handstand, L-sit



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Street Workouts continued

Elbow levers -

You hold yourself parallel to the ground in elbow levers. Unlike the planche, though, you use your elbows as support points for your body, making it much easier than the planche. Any sturdy horizontal base or even hand rails or other bars can be used for practicing exercises in an elbow lever progression. There isn't a direct carryover of strength between the elbow lever and planche, but practicing elbow levers does help a lot with improving balance for planches. Elbow levers could also be used to help learn how to hold tension for flags.

Planches -

These require a great deal of upper body strength and balance. The idea is that you try to hold your body parallel to the ground. You can use parallettes, parallel bars, any sturdy horizontal base, hand rails, or even the ground!

Planche progression page by Naka Athletics -

<http://goo.gl/DydceB>

Straight arm handstand presses and pseudo planche pushups are two exercises that are useful in building strength for the planche.

There are many fun and impressive gymnastics skills beyond these, but they fall outside the scope of this article. Check out the great YouTube channel below for ways to train, and inspiration -

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SevenGymnasticsGirls>

The Naka Athletics YouTube channel also has a lot of amazing videos. They are dedicated to "all action sports athletes across all skill levels—from professional athletes to beginners trying to learn a new sport." Visit their channel for a lot of great tutorials on skills, strength training, how to coach, and more!

<https://www.youtube.com/user/nakaathletics>

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Street Workouts continued

My own hand balancing “cheat sheet” -  
Included in the next section of this guide

The book Overcoming Gravity includes many more skills and progressions for gymnastics style hand balancing! Check out the digital edition below -

<http://goo.gl/oSNl5C>

*Ab work*

L-sits, levers, leg raises (flat or hanging leg raises, knee tucks, partner resisted etc)

*Leg work*

Squats, lunges, plyometrics, sprints, hill sprints, car or truck pushing, partner resisted exercises, park bench exercises, tire training, etc.

*Bridging*

Bridge curls, partner assistance, weighted bridges

Backbends, wall bridges, back walkover – have at least one spotter

This isn't a comprehensive list of minimalist calisthenics, but hopefully it gives you a lot of great ideas! Keep it progressive, safe, and fun!

**Progressions**

The Convict Conditioning books – authored by Paul Wade – have great body weight only progressions, detailed explanations, plenty of pictures, and workout routines. The old school Convict Conditioning approach and Al Kavadlo's new school approach are what the PCC curriculum is based on. Check out the detail page for the first book below -

<http://goo.gl/cBq427>

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### Street Workouts continued

Francesco Vaccaro's YouTube channel has a lot of great tutorials on many of the exercises in Convict Conditioning -

<https://www.youtube.com/user/dragonflowyoga>

"The Tao of PCC" by Paul Wade lists the progressions in PCC, which include various statics (levers, bridges, etc) and dynamic moves (handstand pushups, dips, etc).

<http://pccbog.dragondoor.com/the-tao-of-pcc-by-paul-wade/>

### **Athletics, lifting, and more**

Sprints, hill sprints, sports / agility drills, partner work (wrestling style pummeling, partner assisted or resisted exercises, etc.)

Found object / odd object lifting – park bench exercises, car or truck pushing, tire training, hammer training, stone training, etc.

Zach Even Esh, founder of Underground Strength, teaches various odd object lifts, strongman lifts, and exercises that can be done outdoors. His book, linked below, has some tough beginner, intermediate, and advanced workout routines, as well as pictures and explanations.

<http://goo.gl/WgiD9A>

I have a blog about odd object training, complete with PDF writeups and YouTube playlists. Check out the "all about" post on the blog here - <http://goo.gl/gJd4TP>

I have also included some writings on odd object training, earlier in this guide.

One can also practice Parkour at a local park! Parkour is a holistic discipline that inspired freerunning. Parkour can be practiced anywhere, but usually in urban areas, and essentially treats the training area as an obstacle course. The goal is to go from point a to point b in as efficient manner as possible. It requires all around strength, agility, technique, and explosiveness. Fortunately, there are plenty of great training drills as well as facilities that one can visit to receive competent instruction in this art.

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### Street Workouts continued

Reference: Wikipedia page

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>

Check out Urban Evolution's YouTube channel for some amazing videos about Parkour. I trained at their Alexandria, VA location back in July, 2014, when the PCC workshop (progressive calisthenics certification) was held there. The facility is simply amazing, with more variety in their equipment than I've ever seen! Of course, most of it closely resembled urban environments. The instructors are also compassionate, friendly, and very knowledgeable.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/urbanevo/videos>

#### **“Where do I start?”**

The first thing to do is set training goals. Do some research on the listed progressions and select at least one goal each for pushing, pulling, legs, abs, and statics. Make sure that you are consistent with your workouts, and that you have balance – at least one pushing exercise and at least one pulling exercise, for instance. Beginners should keep workouts simple, and train 1 or 2 times per week until endurance has improved. Full body workouts are recommended. Find a competent instructor, personal trainer, or coach with experience in calisthenics and/or gymnastics.

Great article on setting goals -

<http://goo.gl/SvrZzt>

My workout design and templates articles -  
Included earlier in this guide

Here is a list of training goals that one can train for -

<http://goo.gl/xxOhNZ>

Great article by the lead PCC instructor -

<http://goo.gl/gcZIWg>

[StrengthGuidePDF.com](http://StrengthGuidePDF.com)

Street Workouts continued

My own progressive calisthenics “cheat sheet” – only one page! It lists most of the “intensity variables” you’ll ever need, and other factors that need to be considered in training. It is included in the next section of this guide.

Caveman Conditioning: Uncivilized, Minimalist Training Methods -  
Also earlier in this guide

Information on the female street workout world championships and much more -  
<https://www.facebook.com/WSWCF>

The technical guidelines that I teach for the dynamic movement and static progressions fall outside the scope of this article. However, I usually go over them in classes and clinics. I do have other articles that detail the performance of calisthenics exercises, though! Refer to the article in this guide titled “All about progressive calisthenics”.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to send me an e-mail -  
[owen@johnstonkarate.com](mailto:owen@johnstonkarate.com)

Also check out my full list of training resources -  
<http://goo.gl/3rJvBg>

[StrengthGuidePDF.com](http://StrengthGuidePDF.com)

Cheat Sheet section

Progressive calisthenics – page 103

Hand balancing for skill and strength – page 104

Calisthenics style grip work – 106

Progressive calisthenics cheat sheet

## Mechanics of progression:

To understand the basic principles of progression, think of them in terms of intensity variables.

Leverage, positioning (hands, feet), range of motion, speed, weight to limb ratio, vector, tension, tightening up technique, tension, alignment, emphasis / isolation, symmetry (one hand or two, one foot or two, or even using a transitional position), self assistance, partner assistance, angle / vector, points of contact, wide or narrow base, inter-set rest, volume, frequency

Types of progression include, but are not limited to:

Linear - double, triple, etc

Non-linear - stepped, waved, etc

Training protocols include, but are not limited to:

Ladders

Pyramids

Circuit training

Interval training

Periodization (planning training cycles) includes, but is not limited to, these types:

Block periodization

Stepped

Waved

Daily undulating periodization

Other areas and factors that need to be kept in mind for success in training:

Kinesiology

Body mechanics

Physics

Proper nutrition

Recovery

Lifestyle factors

Planning training goals

Brief, intense workouts

Motivation

Consistency

Hand balancing for skill and strength - “cheat sheets”The importance of hand balancing and shoulder health

Hand balancing is very high priority in gymnastics, as well as strength on bars. Carrying the entire body's weight through the arms and hands dictates a need for a high level of upper body strength. This makes proper training in progressions absolutely essential.

Developing and maintaining shoulder health and integrity are also a top priority in gymnastics. Virtually all body weight training for the upper body goes through the shoulders. Gymnastics is also a very rigorous sport where many skills require a degree of joint health and muscular strength to perform correctly without injury. Prehab and mobility work for the shoulders should be practiced regularly.

Mechanics and Variables

View the progressive calisthenics cheat sheet for other variables to keep in mind.

Alignment / posture

Points of contact

Wide or narrow base

Back arched or flat

With or without wall

Use of equipment or found objects

Partner assistance

Hand walking (on floor or up stairs)

Improve awareness of how your body is moving in space and relative to your environment

Shifting your center of gravity as needed for variations of exercises

Ways to get into and out of a handstand

Skill progressions, partner cues, and spotting are necessary in the learning stages.

Kick up

Straddle up

Pike up

Tripod up

On rings, parallettes, parallel bars

Pirouette out

Kick out

Back or forward roll out



Hand balancing for skill and strength - “cheat sheets” continuedStrength and Skill Progressions

Other progressions may be developed and/or used as needed.

Frog stand

Planche

Elbow lever

Marion pushups

Pike handstand pushups

Handstand pushups

Partner cues

Use your own creativity, experience, and expertise to make up your own partner cues.

Imagine a straight line (placement of line will depend on variation)

Look at a certain point (wall, floor, toes, etc.)

Keep pushing through your hands

Keep your feet lined up with your hands (spot trainee and manually adjust technique)

Calisthenics style grip work – "cheat sheets"

Any athlete dependent on upper body strength needs to concern themselves with strength, health, and joint integrity in the shoulders, elbows, and hands. Also, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and in many modern athletes, this link is commonly grip strength. I will list exercises that for the wrists and forearms that athletes, especially gymnasts, can focus on to help improve their performance and prevent injury. The approach used is minimalist and calisthenics oriented. Special equipment, expensive but useless gadgets, and complex training programs aren't required.

Below is all that you need:

1. Your own bodyweight - With some creativity and just your own bodyweight, you can design your own workout basically no matter where you are
2. Something to hang from - pullup bar, handrails at a public park, monkey bars, tree, etc.
3. Towels - may be used to increase the thickness of the bar, or looped over it and gripped, etc.
4. Thick bars - these really work the grip! As noted above, a towel may be used, or one may find a thick bar in say, a public park or some gyms.
5. Simple, progressive techniques - no fancy, hard to learn exercises.

List of exercises on the next page

Calisthenics style grip work – "cheat sheets" continuedExercise List**Warmups -**

Joint circling

Aikido and gymnastics stretches for the wrists

Eagle claw - stretch out your fingers, ball them up into a fist, and repeat at least several more times to help warm up the hands

**Grip work exercises -**

Make sure that trainees new to training the extremities (hands / forearms, neck, calves) only practice these exercises once a week at first. Caution is strongly advised. The hands and wrists contain many small joints that can easily be over-trained to injury. Progression should be slow and steady compared to training the larger muscle groups.

Hang grip work progression - tougheners (intensity variables) specific to this progression include adding hang time, using one or more towels in various ways, using less fingers, and explosive grip work. Making use of tougheners helps you find "hidden steps" between exercises in a designated progression. Here are a few uses of towels that make for some intense tougheners:

1. Wrap a towel around the bar to make it an "improvised thick bar"
2. Loop a towel over the bar and:
  - a. Grip around the towel with one hand while the other hand holds onto the bar
  - b. Grip a side of the towel with one hand and the opposite side with the other hand
  - c. Grip around the towel with both hands (one hand above the other) - hold for time, switch hand positions and repeat
3. Fold the towel once then loop it over the bar to double the towel's thickness
4. Loop two towels over the bar and grip one in each hand
5. Build up to using one hand to hang from a single towel looped over the bar

Pullups using towels and/or thick bars - design your own progressions. Explore the previous tougheners as well as tougheners for other pullup progressions.

Progressions for finger tip holds / pushups and wrist holds / pushups - for balanced strength in the muscles and joints of the lower arms.

Calisthenics style grip work – "cheat sheets" continuedJust for the sake of completeness

Teens and adults may engage in these types of training if they want or need to take the training of their extremities a step further. This list isn't strictly calisthenics. The general idea is old fashioned hard work!

Rope climbing

Rice bucket exercises

Wrist roller work

Sandbag training

Sled dragging

Farmer's walk (using kettlebells, sandbags, barbells, etc.)

Strongman and/or karate style training with found objects (hammers, anvils, ceramic jars)

Improvised gear (make a barbell out of a pipe or bar with a cement filled can or bucket on each end; make your own wrist roller out of a wooden dowel rod, swivel hook, chain, and weight plates or sandbag; etc.)

Manual labor (farm work, carpentry, steel mill work, blacksmithing, etc.)

**Resources**

For a free one-page list of supplementary resources I highly recommend, visit the Understanding Karate home page and click on the link near the top that says 'Supplementary Resources'.

<http://understandingkarate.com/>

For free books and videos, plus the latest news, please view the Johnston Karate home page -

<http://www.johnstonkarate.com>

To learn more about my qualifications, or contact me for a free consultation, visit my personal page -

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

For quick links to class information, visit my class website and click on “quick links” at the top -

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com>

Fitness links for martial artists - <http://goo.gl/KssWVu>

Full list of articles - <http://goo.gl/JaloKQ>

<http://oddobjecttraining.blogspot.com/>

<http://freekaratedownloads.blogspot.com/>

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com/>

### **About the Author**

I am a native of Lake City, SC and teach karate as a way of life. I serve Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I have been actively training since June 10th, 2002, when I enrolled at the Nippon Kokusai Karate Center (NKKC) dojo in Lake City, SC. I took over management of the dojo in January 2004, and obtained the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> degree black belt in October of that year. NKKC is affiliated with Japan International Karate Center (JIKC). View JIKC History - <http://www.jikc-hq.org/history.html>

In late April 2005, I officially split from NKKC and founded Johnston Karate. Since then, I have had the opportunity to train in various other styles. Besides having continued teaching karate over the years, I have trained at various other JIKC dojo. I trained at a boxing gym in Sumter, SC, for about 3 years. I also trained once a week for a year and a half in Brazilian JiuJitsu, in Conway, SC.

If you would like to view full info on my qualifications, schedule a free trial class or consultation, or contact me for any other reason, please visit the following webpage –

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/>

Mizuumi ryu Karate is the style that I created, and teach. The nucleus of the style is formed by Heiwado Karate (the style of Japan International Karate Center) and Boxing, with influences from grappling arts. The style is dedicated to the development of body, mind, and spirit. The Mizuumi ryu main page on our website will include all of the latest details regarding locations where the style is taught, and other news.

<http://mizuumiryukarate.com>

For a free one-page list of supplementary resources I highly recommend, visit the Understanding Karate home page and click on the link near the top that says 'Supplementary Resources'.

<http://understandingkarate.com/>

'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'  
- Philippians 1:21

'It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'

- Theodore Roosevelt

# The Johnston Karate Guide to Functional Strength

Owen Johnston

<http://www.johnstonkarate.com>

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